



PHD

**How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?**

Cunningham, Ben

*Award date:*  
1999

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

## **Alternative formats**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

### **Take down policy**

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: [openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk) with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

**How do I come to know my spirituality,  
as I create my own living  
educational theory?**

submitted by Ben Cunningham  
for the degree of Ph.D.  
of the University of Bath,  
1999

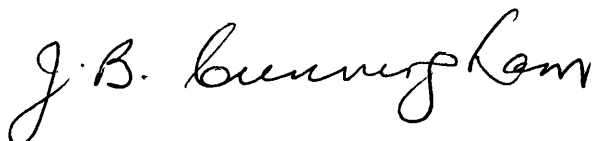
**Copyright**

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. This copy of the thesis has been supplied on the condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

**Restrictions**

This thesis may be available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. B. Cunningham', written in black ink.

UMI Number: U601423

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U601423

Published by ProQuest LLC 2013. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

UNIVERSITY OF BATH LIBRARY		
15	- 7 FEB 2000	



## **Acknowledgements**

My very sincere thanks to all those teachers who, welcoming me into their lives became my friends, and whose words in my thesis were a source of constant inspiration to me in coming to know my spirituality.

Sincere thanks to the members of the Action Research Group at the Department of Education, University of Bath, whose friendship and probing questions enabled me to keep constantly open to new learning.

Special thanks to Moira Laidlaw, whose friendship and insightful support and reading of various drafts of my chapters, enabled me to become ever more confident in expressing my spirituality.

To Pat D'Arcy, my sincere and grateful thanks for all the hours spent using her Ph.D. expertise to make 'engaged' and 'appreciative' responses to my writing.

Grateful thanks to Judi Marshall whose exquisite sensitivity enabled me at one point to unblock my writing and begin writing again.

To Jack Whitehead, a most special word of thanks for his boundless enthusiasm, for his certainty that I had a tale to tell about my spirituality, for his insight and careful supervision, and for his friendship and hospitality.

## **Abstract**

### **How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?**

My thesis is a narrative which offers the following distinct and original contributions to educational knowledge, as I show originality of mind and critical judgment in connecting the personal with the professional in my explanations of my educative relationships with others:

I show how my living engagement with my God is enabling me to author my life and is part of the interweaving of my values in my educative relationships with others.

I show the meaning of my values as I explain my educative relationships in terms of how I dialectically engage the intrapersonal with the interpersonal.

I show how a dialectic of both care and challenge that is sensitive to difference, is enabling me to create my own living educational theory which is a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

I show how my leadership comes into being in my words and actions as I exercise my ethic of responsibility towards others.

## **Contents**

<b><u>Acknowledgements</u></b>	<b><i>Page ii</i></b>
<b><u>Abstract</u></b>	<b><i>Page iii</i></b>
<b><u>Contents</u></b>	<b><i>Page iv</i></b>
<b><u>Foreword</u></b>	<b><i>Page 1</i></b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b><i>Page 3</i></b>
<b><u>Chapter 1</u></b>	<b><i>Page 8</i></b>

***What is the most appropriate ear for the reader  
to bring to my thesis?***

## Chapter 2

Page 39

*How have I educatively influenced and, in turn, been educatively influenced in my role as a teacher educator to a teacher, that teacher becoming an action research tutor to her teacher colleague, one of whose pupils writes about her own concerns?*

## Chapter 3

Page 102

*What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with 'John'?*

## Chapter 4

Page 146

*How do I enable 'David' to master his fears concerning discipline through offering him challenging questions that will excite his imagination towards using creative solutions?*

## Chapter 5

Page 185

*How do I explore and explain the nature of a professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at a college of education and come to a knowledge of how to resolve it as I exercise my leadership 'differently'?*

**Chapter 6**

**Page 242**

***What is the significance of the 'living' spiritual ideas of Tom Merton and others to my action enquiry about how I relate to myself and others?***

**Chapter 7**

**Page 294**

***How do I now understand my educational development in the light of my thesis question, 'How have I come to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory?'***

**Bibliography**

**Page 332**

**Appendix**

**Page 357**

**Action Research:**

***'How do I improve what I am doing?'***

## **Foreword**

I am Ben Cunningham and am now 57 years of age at the time of writing. I rather like being this age and even dare to hope that some maturity may be accompanying it.

I have been a member of a Catholic religious teaching congregation since I was fifteen years of age - a span of 42 years. In connection with that membership, I have undertaken three vows, of chastity, poverty and obedience which have become for me in recent years, vows respectively for relatedness, stewardship (including hospitality) and partnership.

As well as being a vowed religious, I have also been, from the age of nineteen years, an educator - a span of 38 years.

Because my religious congregation made all the initial decisions regarding my educational career, I learned early the meaning of improvisation, even if self-realisation came much later.

I was first asked to become a primary teacher. After nine years my religious congregation found they had more vacancies to fill in their secondary schools than in their primary schools and so I became a secondary teacher, gaining my academic and professional qualifications as I was teaching.

My first educational decision regarding my career was accepted by my religious congregation, albeit reluctantly, when, after some years of secondary teaching, I asked to be allowed to qualify as a guidance counsellor. I did so because I was worried about the comparatively large number of pupils I experienced as being unable to adapt to being in school. I now balanced classroom teaching with guidance work and an interest in curriculum development.

After eight years as a guidance counsellor I was pleasantly surprised to be asked to become principal of a disadvantaged inner-city

secondary school in which I had previously served as a secondary school teacher and guidance counsellor. The mandate I got from my congregation was the following: 'use your expertise in curriculum development to introduce suitable curricula for the disadvantaged'. Though I taught about half-time, I found myself spending most of my time talking to teachers in order to let them know more about who I was and to let me hear their first-hand, person-to-person views about how we could help the more disadvantaged pupils to become successful in our school. At a celebration to mark the end of my principalship in June 1990, it wasn't so much what I had done in terms of curriculum development that at least one of the teachers remembered, but the following:

*When I asked you in 1984 what your policy on discipline was, do you remember what you said? You said that, for you, justice was crucial. I now know what you meant - you actually tried to be fair to all of us.*

Fairness was an important component of the care I felt towards others, as was freedom. When I learned to become an action researcher at a teacher education college, 1990 to 1995, I tried to embody these self-same values in my practice as I supported teachers in their action enquiries.

I now need to comment, however briefly, on my expectations, or otherwise, of others *vis-a-vis* my thesis question, "How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?" My thesis is about my own improvisatory discovery of my form of spirituality. It offers no predictions, prescriptions, nor definitions to others about how they might initiate their own spiritual discovery. I neither expect nor intend that my readers should follow my path towards spiritual discovery. I shall be delighted, however, if they find a way to relate to it which encourages them to start out on their own individual pathway to discovering their own form of spirituality.

## **Introduction**

In this text, I claim to show originality of mind and critical judgment in connecting the personal with the professional in my explanations of my educative relationships with others.

Relationships are crucial to me. I agree with Noddings (1984: 4) when she maintains that:

*Taking relation as ontologically basic simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence.*

Relating to others fills me with joy and delight and gives me a reason for hope. I believe I can't educatively affect others unless I get to know them personally by giving them of myself, of my joy, of my interest, of my understanding, of my knowledge, of my humour, of my sadness, of whatever is alive in me in order to enhance their aliveness. As I come to know others I take responsibility, however, for my own participation but not for theirs.

In my encounters with others I believe that it is not the educational intentions that I bring that are paramount so much as the encounters themselves that are educational. As Buber (1965: 107) puts it:

*It is not the educational intention but it is the meeting which is educationally fruitful.*

The encounters are educational because others and myself come to mutually accept each other, affirm each other, confirm each other (Buber, 1988: 75). In being accepted, affirmed and confirmed, we are more confidently able to answer questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" and, "How do I live out my values in my practice?" (Whitehead, 1993).

I am committed to dialogue although I know that truly establishing meaningful dialogue in relationships is difficult. Tschumi (in Biesta,



1998: 17) warns me that each of us wants to come into inter-subjective presence, but in doing so we constantly transgress each other's rules. Ellsworth (1997: 1-2) reminds me, also, that in dialogue I will always lack full understanding of the other and of myself.

Undeterred, however, I am committed to dialogue because it is my opening into relationship and therefore a part of my hope for humanity. It is part of my hope that authentic encounters can lead to processes of self-discovery that are beneficial both to myself and others. Following Van Kaam (1969: 299), I subscribe to the view that: *"the dialectics of authentic encounter are the dialectics of self-discovery,"* which is part of my journey of improvisatory self-realisation, involving myself and others. It is through the multifarious dialogues represented in my thesis that I get a sense of my qualities as a person and an educator (Wilson and Wilson, 1998: 357), as I endeavour to live out my values, especially those of freedom and love, in my personal and professional relationships with others.

In living out my spiritual values I am answering a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self, which is linked to my value of love for others. These spiritual qualities of freedom and love enable me to live out authentically and integrally my personal and professional commitment to others in relationship.

I exercise my value of freedom, too, by creatively producing a thesis that makes use of a narrative form that offers an authentic description and explanation of my educational practice.

### Themes in my thesis

Below, I briefly outline the contents of each chapter of my thesis:

#### Chapter 1

In order to help the reader to contextualise and understand my thesis, I deal with the following ideas in this chapter:

1. Contextualising my thesis
2. Legitimising my thesis
3. My standards of judgment
4. My form of representation
5. Introducing those with whom I have been conversing

## Chapter 2

I persuade Marion, an English teacher, to become a tutor to her colleague, Valerie, an R.E. teacher. I show that care is, for me, a legitimate anxiety to ensure that Marion is as free from fears as is humanly possible. I persuade Valerie to encourage her pupils to write about their own concerns. In reading her pupil, Rose's, account, I realise my understanding of freedom has become enlarged. I learn from Valerie's decision not to reply to my correspondence - another aspect of freedom - that she is separate and different from me.

## Chapter 3

This chapter is about one of the distinct and original claims I make to educational knowledge (see my Abstract, p. iii above): I show how my living engagement with my God and John which is enabling John to free himself from his fears, is helping me to author my life, and is part of the interweaving of my values in my educative relationships with others.

## Chapter 4

In order to enable David to become more reflective I move beyond the rational, linear form of the action research cycle to use and embrace the imagination. In using my imagination I compose an interior

monologue and discover anew the meaning of care and love, and the importance of not attempting to reduce David to the 'sameness' that is me (Levinas in Kearney, 1984).

## Chapter 5

Despite efforts to get me to conform to what is expected of me as leader of an action research project, I am determined to control my own life. In taking responsibility for the professional conflict I experience, I describe in two imaginary dialogue how I "*become more myself*" and "*come to accept 'where I am' in life.*" But side by side with my effort to deal with conflict and be more myself there is the educational work I am doing with teachers as I relate to them in ways that enable them to improve what they are doing.

## Chapter 6

I am passionately concerned about my own identity and integrity, as I situate myself in the writings of Merton and others. One of these others is Macmurray whose writings emphasise that creating community is about "*personal relations.*" I wish to help create community anew by living out my values of freedom and love through my vows for relatedness, stewardship, and partnership (O Murchu, 1995).

## Chapter 7

How do I now understand my educational development in the light of my thesis question - "*How do I come to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory?*" Distilling my understanding of my educational development and my coming to know my spirituality is helped by the offer of a post-doctorate job.

### How are the the chapters linked together?

What links all the chapters in the thesis together? I believe it is my embodiment of the values of freedom and love, together with authenticity and integrity in relationship with others, that permeates all the chapters. Various people appear in the chapters, of course, and they play their important part, but only within the chapter in which they appear and afterwards are gone. The only person who appears in every chapter as agent, and who is also author of the thesis, is myself. So my question to myself is this: how does my presence throughout the thesis form a link between the chapters? I believe the link is formed through my learning about my educational development. This learning is, I believe, cumulative and developmental, as my learning from each relationship is cumulative and developmental.

### Note

I use one font, Bookman, throughout my thesis. I use italics and indentation for long quotations from writers and for lengthy conversations with others.

Each chapter starts with a heading in bold, which is followed by a summary of the chapter.

I use underlined *italicised* headings in the various chapters, and *italicised* sub-headings, without underlining, as sub-sets of the underlined italicised headings.

At their request, I have preserved in this thesis the anonymity of those teachers and others with whom I worked. When I do use 'real' names, I use surnames for authors, but use both first names and surnames for people for whom anonymity is not important.

## Chapter 1

### **What is the most appropriate ear for the reader to bring to my thesis?**

In using this first chapter to help the reader to understand my thesis, I have divided it into 5 sections, each of whose headings is italicised and underlined. The sub-headings that occur under the main headings are italicised but not underlined. The main headings are as follows:

1. Contextualising my thesis (p. 8)
2. Legitimising my thesis (p. 16)
3. My standards of judgment (p. 20)
4. My form of representation (p. 26)
5. Introducing those with whom I have been conversing (p. 33)

#### 1. Contextualising my thesis

In contextualising my thesis I need to address two issues in particular. Firstly, that I can develop theory from the ground of my being, that I can generate self knowledge. Secondly, that I can evolve my own standards of practice by explaining my educational practice in terms of my embodied values that give meaning to my life in education.

In addressing the community of teacher educators who are the primary audience for my thesis, I want to address the significance of my thesis in relation to my first issue "*that I can develop theory from the ground of my being, that I can generate self knowledge.*" I am going to do so in relation to the recommended draft Code of good practice for writings submitted for publication by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). BERA's current Newsletter, *Research Intelligence* (No. 68, April, 1999: 17), in its

preamble to the draft Code, lays down *'two main thrusts to educational research'* as follows:

*(a) to inform understandings of educational issues, drawing on and developing theory in a sociological, psychological, philosophical, economic, or historic sphere; and*

*(b) to inform pedagogic, curricular and other educational judgments and decisions.*

*Some research includes both.*

The Code goes on to state about (a) and (b) above that:

*These activities have a common purpose in the advancement of trustworthy knowledge about education and much of this new knowledge is communicated in writing. Over the years various conventions and practices have developed about such writing. In publishing this Code, BERA seeks to draw attention to what a panel of its members have considered to be good practice in writing about the heterogeneity of work arising from educational research.*

What is missing here I feel is the idea that I can develop theory from the ground of my being in my practice, the idea that I can generate self knowledge, the kind of knowledge which I feel is at the heart of education as I practise it. It is through generating self knowledge that I come to know what it means to be a professional educator. In my thesis I show how I generate and embody these meanings in my life and practice. And while I accept the use-value to educational research of the propositional theories contained in the disciplines of education such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, and history, as propounded by BERA in their draft Code above, I show how I make a claim to know my own educational development through connecting the personal with the professional in my explanation of my educative relationships with others. I show how I live out my values as I answer a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self, which is linked to my value of love for others. These spiritual qualities of freedom and love enable me to live out authentically and integrally my personal and professional commitment to others in relationship. I use my values to make

decisions that give a form to my life in education. I make a claim to know my own educational development in a creative and critical way as I hold in mind Polanyi's (1958/1974: 327) view that:

*I must understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his judgment with universal intent ....*

In making my own judgments and recognising my own originality in the creation of my thesis I feel I am also exercising my radical, personal freedom.

*My living educational theory is a form of 'improvisatory self-realisation'*

My thesis shows that, while it includes BERA's view of educational research (1999: 17), it goes further. It describes and explains how I create my own living educational theory as a form of '*improvisatory self-realisation*' (Winter, 1998), a theory that is based on, and grows from, my descriptions and explanations of my educational development as I undertake what Winter (*ibid*) calls "*a sort of journey of self-discovery*." This journey isn't undertaken by me alone, but includes others. It has in fact two dimensions: it comprises dialogues that are both intrapersonal ('intra' meaning within) and interpersonal ('inter' meaning with others). Lomax (1999: 14) has another way of characterising this journey when she calls it a form of learning,

*which is the outcome of a dialectical process that leads to change. I think there are two aspects to this - (a) the way we learn through representing our meanings to ourselves (an intra-subjective dialectic) and (b) the way we learn by representing our meanings to others (an inter-subjective dialectic).*

Following Whitehead (1999: 2), I feel that it is impossible, because of the improvisatory nature of educational enquiry, to pre-specify all the rules which will give my life in education its unique form. I agree with him, too, when he says that:

*As individuals give a form to their lives there is an art in*

*synthesising their unique constellation of values, skills and understandings into an explanation for their own learning. I am thinking of the art of the dialectician described by Socrates in which individuals hold together, in a process of question and answer, their capacities for analysis with their capacities for synthesis.*

*My enquiry is a living one*

Let me now address the second issue I mention above in relation to the significance of my thesis, that: *"I can evolve my own standards of practice by explaining my educational practice in terms of my embodied values that give meaning to my life in education."* I will do so as I relate this issue to the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* outlined in the professional magazine, *Professionally Speaking* (March 1999), sponsored by the Ontario College of Teachers.

The Ontario College of Teachers puts forward *"five standards of practice statements"* (p. 6) as it asks, *"How well do the five standards of practice statements .... answer the question, 'What does it mean to be a teacher?'"* The five standards of practice statements have the following headings:

- \* Commitments to Students and Student Learning*
- \* Professional Knowledge*
- \* Teaching Practice*
- \* Leadership and Community*
- \* Ongoing Professional Learning*

I am not going to analyse all the headings above nor the statements that accompany them. This would be outside the remit of my thesis. I am choosing just one heading above to illuminate my concern that standards of practice do not need to be grounded in conceptual forms. At random I choose the heading, *Commitments to Students and Student Learning*, which is accompanied by the following statement:

*Teachers demonstrate care for and commitment to students. They are dedicated to engaging and supporting student learning. Teachers treat students equitably and with respect. They encourage students to grow as individuals and as contributing members of society. Teachers assist students to become life-long*



learners.

While admiring the noble sentiment and sense of value that went into composing this statement and others like it, I do find it difficult to accept that a consideration of lists or statements about standards of practice can satisfactorily answer the question, “*What does it mean to be a teacher/a teacher educator?*” It seems to me that this question and the statements and lists accompanying it are grounded only within the conceptual form favoured by Hirst and Peters (1970) and BERA (1999). They are not living in the sense in which I understand it. Educational theory is living (Whitehead in Lomax, 1999: 14) in that it is about

*an explanation by an individual of his/her own educational practice in terms of an evaluation of past practice and an intention to create an improvement which is not yet in existence.*

One implication for my living practice is that I as a teacher educator need to gather evidence about my practice, but such evidence need not “*necessarily imply an absolutist stance*”, as Lomax (1999: 13) sees it. It may in fact “*be relative*”. She adds that:

*evidence is any argument or data I can provide you or you can provide me that convinces either of us that the claims we make are believable.*

She (*ibid*) also says that:

*In the past there has been a tendency to accept scientific evidence which appeals to rational criteria rather than other evidence that might appeal to moral, spiritual, political, aesthetic, emotional or affective criteria that practitioners might employ.*

In my thesis I offer evidence, especially about my spiritual qualities connected with freedom and love in my personal and professional relationships with others as a professional educator.

*Helping to create a new discipline of educational enquiry*

As well as her useful comments about evidence, Lomax with Whitehead (1998) supports a very important idea for educational researchers. Lomax and Whitehead call it “*a new discipline of educational enquiry.*” Lomax uses the idea of a discipline to mean “*the ways of thinking, theorising, practising or enquiring which constitute the thing itself*” (1999). Her meaning of ‘discipline’ is not to be confused with the idea of Hirst and Peters (1970) that educational theory is constituted by sociology, philosophy and psychology. But how is this new discipline of educational enquiry different from the formulations of Hirst and Peters? It is, as Lomax (*ibid*) points out:

*epistemologically and methodically distinct .... because it includes the values which constitute the idea of ‘educational.’*

Whitehead (1999: 2) agrees with Lomax in viewing a new discipline of educational enquiry as:

*a discipline, whose rules are the embodied values .... which the individual uses to give purpose and to make meaning of their life in education. In other words, this new discipline of educational enquiry, is constituted not solely by linguistically defined rules and the conceptual theories and frameworks of the traditional disciplines of education. It is constituted by the values which are embodied in what is being done by professional educators and their students in particular contexts.*

Lomax (Lomax and Whitehead, 1998: 10) tells us what Whitehead’s idea of a new discipline of educational enquiry is. It is based on three of his arguments as follows:

*The first is that in questions of the kind, “How do I improve my practice?”, “I” exists as a living contradiction in holding values and experiencing their denial at the same time as asking the question. The second is that “I” as a living contradiction is motivated to improve what he or she is doing .... The third is that the descriptions and explanations for their own learning which individuals create, constitute their own living educational theories.*

Whitehead (1993: 75) also maintains that the propositional form of discourse in “*the traditional disciplines of education*” can be incorporated within a living form of theory. I understand from Whitehead (*ibid*), however, that I should not see the living form of

theory in purely propositional terms. In my thesis then, I see my own living form of theory existing in my life as I reflect on the implications of asking myself questions of the kind, "*How do I improve my practice?*."

As I understand it, the traditional disciplines approach to education are forms of what Popper (1972, in McNiff, 1993: 23) called objective knowledge. According to Ayer (in McNiff, 1993: 22) objective knowledge is a knowledge which is more or less reified or fixed. It is 'known,' it exists 'out there.' It is independent of me as 'knower.' If I aspire to this kind of knowledge I must gain access to the body of knowledge which constitutes it. This knowledge, existing independently of me, consists of explicitly formulated ideas and statements that are 'out there.' This form of knowledge is also referred to as propositional knowledge. Propositional knowledge is about statements that are assumed to be true. Knowledge, in this sense, is seen as an input: and the acquisition of such knowledge is seen in terms of output (McNiff, 1993: 25). However, I can access another form of knowledge, dialectical knowledge.

Dialectical knowledge is a form of knowledge based on enquiry in which, according to Collingwood (in Eames 1993: 4), "*the interplay of question and answer*" takes place. The answer to each question is unknown, or only dimly apprehended, at the time the question is asked. Each answer, however, goes beyond the question (Eames in Ghaye & Wakefield, 1993: 4-5). It is a process which is a living and developmental form of knowledge. Following Whitehead (1999: 9), if I think of dialectical logic as a process of change, then I can resist whatever imposition propositional logic, or any other system or structure, may place on me. When I ask questions of the kind, "*How can I improve what I am doing?*," I am intending to take responsibility for my concerns, ideas and actions. In doing so I have the possibility of creating dialectical knowledge, which has the power to transform my practice. Eames (in Whitehead, 1999: 12) reminds me that unlike propositional knowledge, dialectical knowledge doesn't allow me to "*decide beforehand.*" I have to be open to others, which can lead to "*changed understanding.*"

A part of my task in this thesis has been to combine the logics of knowledge, propositional and dialectical logic, in my descriptions and explanations of my practice. I do so by including propositional logic within dialectical logic. Both logics are of use-value to me in that, for example, propositional logic helps me to understand from the 'outside', as it were, and dialectical logic from the 'inside' (Whitehead, 1999: 6-14).

Dialectical logic obviously involves dialogue and I want now to say something about its importance to me as part of the new discipline of educational enquiry that I am practising. In the form and content of my action research account there is dialogue, both internal and with others in which I show evidence of my learning. I am committed to this kind of inter-relational dialogue. Bernstein (1991/1993: 337-338) says of dialogue that I should assume that the other in the dialogue has something to say to me that will contribute to my understanding. That I need, in fact, *"to grasp the other's position in the strongest possible light"; "to be responsive to what the other is saying and showing."* In order to do so I need to be imaginative, sensitive and good at interpreting what is being said. There is a to-and-fro movement in my dialogical encounters which seeks *"for a common ground in which we can understand our differences."* (ibid). I need to understand, too, that conflict is important, *"because understanding does not entail agreement. On the contrary, it is the way to clarify our disagreements."* (ibid).

Gadamer's view of dialogue, while I consider it to be inspiring, is difficult to realise. He says (1987: 135) that:

*One does not seek to score a point by exploiting the other's weaknesses; rather, one seeks to strengthen the other's argument as much as possible so as to render it plausible.*

I'm not sure to what extent I've endeavoured to do that. Certainly, if I did it, I did it unconsciously. I think what I've consciously tried to do in my dialogic encounters is to see through the eyes of others, but not to cease seeing through my own eyes (Buber in Friedman, 1960:

205-206). I made this differentiation, in particular, when dealing with John in chapter 3. Though I truly aim to hold a sense of ethical responsibility for the other (Levinas in Kearney, 1984), I do not aim to be impartially objective: I couldn't be, no matter how hard I tried. I feel I need to hold my own ground in order to deal justly with the other. To do otherwise would, I feel, be futile, ineffective, and certainly inauthentic for me. It would indicate, I feel, that I was trying to practise a pure spirituality divorced from what's real, what's concrete (Buber in Friedman, 1960: 205-206).

At the same time, I have tried to establish I-Thou relationships, characterised, as Friedman (*ibid*) puts it, "*by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity, and ineffability,*" knowing that it is "*only within this relation that personality and the personal really exist ....*" (p. 57). Among my personal qualities as an educator is a strong sense of myself, but that is mediated by various empathic elements I know I must bring to my I-Thou relationships with others.

As a reflective teacher educator, I include my own living 'I' as a living contradiction in my use of the common sense form of the action/reflection cycle below (Whitehead, 1985):

- \* I experience a concern when my values are negated in practice;
- \* I imagine a way forward;
- \* I so act and gather data to enable me to make a judgment on the quality and effectiveness of my actions;
- \* I evaluate my actions in terms of my values and understandings;
- \* I modify my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.

## 2. Legitimising my thesis

I need also to consider the legitimisation of my thesis; how my descriptions and explanations of my own educational development

are presented within a form and content that can be publicly tested for validity. To this end I deal now with issues to do with legitimacy, validity and generalisation. I will deal later in section 4 with the question of my form of representation.

### *Legitimacy*

Let me take *legitimacy* first. I draw my explanation of legitimacy from what I've already explained above about "*a new discipline of educational enquiry*." I maintain that I am creating my own living educational theory as a form of '*improvisatory self-realisation*' (Winter, 1998). It is a theory that is based on, and grows from, my descriptions and explanations of my educational development as I undertake what Winter (*ibid*) calls "*a sort of journey of self-discovery*." This journey comprises dialogues that are both intrapersonal ('intra' meaning within) by which I explain my meaning-making to myself, and interpersonal ('inter' meaning with others) by which I explain my meaning-making to others. My journey of self-discovery is an improvisatory one in that in entering educative encounters with others I do not pre-define rules of conduct, nor educational intentions for myself or others. Instead, I use my values of relationship, involving freedom and love, authenticity and integrity, to give meaning to my life in education.

### *Validity*

I understand *validity* to mean: 'does my research really do the things it claims to do, and can the reader believe the results?' (McNiff, 1988). Lomax (1995: 55) puts it thus:

*ideas, interpretations and conclusions about my research are 'shared' with an 'educated' audience who are willing to judge the authenticity and relevance of the work to a professional context.*

Validation is ongoing rather than a one-off event. In the first instance, I offer a 'true' account of my practice in my thesis as a

whole. I work at establishing the relevance of my work in the professional community, e.g., contextualising it in '*a new discipline of educational enquiry*'. Then I test it with professional colleagues in the University of Bath action research group. I request various members to read each of my chapters so that they can "*vicariously experience the arguments and evidence in the light of their understanding of my professional practice*" (Lomax, 1995: 55). They, in fact, comment on all aspects of my research, "*my research questions, my monitoring techniques, my interpretations*" (*ibid*). They also consider my values and practice as a researcher and help pinpoint contradictions. I then incorporate their comments, as appropriate, in the body of my thesis under their own names or pseudonyms.

In working at establishing the relevance of my work, as I explained above, I am, therefore, using the notion of social validation first put forward by Habermas (1976: 2-3) and used by Whitehead (1993: 72-73). The first criterion of social validation is to do with comprehensibility and so I ask the question, "*Is the explanation comprehensible?*" Secondly, regarding truth I ask, "*Are the assertions sufficiently supported by evidence?*". Thirdly, regarding trust and authenticity, I ask, "*Is the speaker expressing his intentions truthfully, so that others can believe what he is saying?*". Fourthly, regarding rightness or appropriateness, I ask, "*Are the values clarified and justified in the course of their emergence in practice?*". Whitehead also adds a last question, "*Does the explanation live in the sense of containing an evaluation of past practice and an intention to create something better in the future?*"

*Generalisability, or authenticity connected to 'reliability'?*

I should perhaps link the idea of generalisability, reliability, and so on, with the notion of validity above but because of their importance to me, I want to treat them separately.

Generalisability, for Bassey (1995: 7),

*requires the investigation of large populations, usually studied by*

*appropriate sampling, and by intention leads to statements which can be used to predict what will occur in other situations.*

But for Lomax (1994: 118), in relation to action research enquiries, the concept of *generalisability* is now “old hat”. Bassey (1995: 111), seems to agree with Lomax when he says that:

*To some people the distinction between a study of singularity and a search for generalisation is pedantic and unnecessary.*

Lomax (1994: 118) explains generalisability as formerly referring to scientific experiments replicated in controlled conditions which have the same result a second time round. But it is important, she says, that:

*action research projects have an application elsewhere, and that action researchers are able to communicate their insights to others with useful results. (ibid).*

So we are talking about the need for the criterion of transparency or authenticity so that an informed outsider can get sufficient information about whether my research is relevant to their situation. Bassey (1995: 111), referring to relatability, says that:

*The point about the relatability of findings from one situation to another is that there is no surety that they can be applied, but the merit of the comparison is that it may stimulate worthwhile thinking.*

Regarding how we may achieve authenticity in accounts, McNiff (1988: 124) says that when we come together to talk about what we have been individually researching, we may not reach consensus, but work at reaching a common understanding that enables us to dialogue with each other and move our understanding of our practice forward, and so continue changing and improving.

### *My data gathering methods*

My method of data gathering was guided by questions of the kind:



*“How do I connect the personal with the professional in my educative relationships?” and, “How do I keep my educational encounters educational by offering acceptance, affirmation and confirmation to the other?”* For me, these questions are sub-sets of the main question of my thesis: *“How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?”*

My data gathering methods emphasise my ‘participative’ rather than ‘spectator’ or ‘observer’ mode. What do I mean? Because of the presence of my “I” as a living contradiction in all of my enquiry questions, I am a participant and not a spectator or observer in my educative encounters with others. I am immersed in relationship encounters with others, encounters which are in themselves educational. I ‘feel’ rather than observe relationships with others, I operate from ‘within’ rather than from without. Consequently, my data gathering methods focus on dialogue that include the personal and the professional. I take ‘dialogue’ to have a wide meaning. It includes face-to-face meetings, most of which are audio-taped. It includes very considerable letter and e-mail correspondence. It also includes many telephone calls in the course of the enquiries. I kept journals from 1992 onwards, but didn’t use many journal entries in the thesis. However, I did turn many of my journal entries into imaginary dialogues and interior monologues which found their way into my thesis.

### 3. My standards of judgment

In my claims to educational knowledge I am offering my claim to know my own educational development as my unit of appraisal in order to gain academic legitimacy (Whitehead, 1993: 54). Among the standards of judgment by which my educational development may be judged, I am putting forward and justifying the values which I use to give form to my life in education (p. 55). Hume (in Whitehead, 1993: 57), in a principle usually attributed to him known as the autonomy of ethics, held that statements of value and statements of fact form logically independent realms of discourse. This principle was upheld

by linguistic philosophers such as Austin (1961), Ryle (1949), Wittgenstein (1953) and others. Following Whitehead (1993), I hold, however, that in my educational development, matters of fact and matters of value are integrated in my experience of concerns or problems that ask and answer questions of the kind, *“How do I improve what I am doing”* and *“How do I live out my values in my practice?”*.

I represent the integration of matters of fact and matters of value in my thesis by using value-words such as freedom and love, authenticity and integrity. The meanings of these words are embodied in my practice and emerge in the course of my attempts to overcome their negation (Feyerabend, 1975 in Whitehead, 1993: 57). I cannot express the meanings of these values in purely linguistic terms, I have to show them in action. I need therefore to use ostensive as well as linguistic meanings of these values (p. 58) as I represent them both propositionally and dialectically in my thesis.

In justifying my claims to know my own educational development, I use ethical/spiritual, aesthetic, social, and methodological standards of judgment.

#### *Using ethical/spiritual standards of judgment*

The ethical/spiritual criteria I use are inextricably a part of my relationships with others in which I connect the personal with the professional in my explanations of my educative relationships (see the Introduction to my thesis above). I move these relationships forward through embodying my values in my practice, particularly those of freedom and love. Because I am a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993), I also contradict my values and so need to negate my contradiction by attempting to improve my embodiment of my values in my practice. I offer both lexical and ostensive definitions of these values throughout my thesis, particularly in chapters 2 to 6.

### *Using aesthetic standards of judgment*

I find it difficult to separate my use of ethical/spiritual, aesthetic and social standards of judgment. And, in fact, I try to link my use of all three standards of judgment here.

Below, under the sub-heading, *social standards of judgment*, I put forward the notion that I, as an individual, as well as my claim to knowledge, am attempting to be authentic in how I reach an understanding with my reader. In putting forward an aesthetic standard of judgment by which my thesis can at least be partly judged, I am attempting to describe and explain my form of life which does not violate the integrity of other individuals. It is a form linked, for me, with my spiritual standard of judgment in that it is about my embodiment of my values in my relationships with others.

In using an aesthetic standard of judgment by which to judge the authenticity of my claim to knowledge, it would be useful to the reader, I believe, to consider an approach which Holbrook (1980, in Whitehead, 1993: 58) calls "*indwelling*." Readers can indwell by being empathic to what I have described and explained about the form of my life which I have presented in my claim to knowledge. Through using "*delicate intuitions, imagination and respect*" (Russell, 1916, in Whitehead, 1993: 58), readers may be able to offer a judgment on whether I have succeeded in presenting my life in a form that does justice to the quality of the relationships that I say I have been involved in creating with teachers and others (chapters, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

I invite my readers, then, through "*reliving the work of the creator*" - me - (Lipps in Whitehead, 1993: 59), to appreciate and identify the process by which I claim to know my form of life in how I embodied my values in my educative relationships with others. I believe, too, that my readers may be helped to appreciate and identify these processes as I show how I have used my form of representation (see below) to portray the contents of my consciousness in this thesis. I experiment with different ways of representing different meanings

because different ways of representing allow for different forms of understanding to be shared with others (Eisner, 1993: 6). I attempt to represent, not the surface features of people or events, but, rather, their expressive character. I attempt to show from my relationships with others that what is most important is not what is apparent, but, instead, what is felt about what is apparent. And so I experiment with an interior monologue and with various imaginary dialogues so that I may express the kind of emotional life that is important to me and others as we improve what we are doing.

### *Using social standards of judgment*

The social standards of judgment (see above under 'validity') I use to criticise and validate my claim to knowledge are those of Habermas (1976) by which I wish to participate in a process of reaching an understanding with my reader. As part of that understanding with my reader, I offer a lexical understanding of my values of authenticity and integrity, whose ostensive meanings are shown throughout my thesis.

In referring to my authenticity, or my honesty and truthfulness about who I have become as a result of my research, I am saying that I hold values, particularly those of freedom and love, which I try to live out in my life and to represent honestly in my thesis. I haven't hidden my representation of myself as a living contradiction: I hold values and I contradict myself in how I live them. I have tried to be authentic, that is, true to myself, even if sometimes I find out in my research that my choices about what I can do are limited because I am limited as a human being. Like other human beings, I have a more or less limited number of personal qualities, a more or less limited consciousness, a more or less limited command of language.

But regardless of these limitations, I also know that I possess gifts and qualities, particularly those pertaining to initiating and sustaining relationship, within which I connect the personal with the professional. I want my reader to be able to assess my

authenticity in whether I have expressed my intentions truthfully (Habermas, 1976) in justifying my values, especially those of freedom and love, as I give form to my life in education. But my claim to authenticity can only be realised when, as Habermas (in Whitehead, 1993: 55) puts it,

*in the interaction it will be shown in time, whether the other side is 'in truth or honestly' participating or is only pretending to engage in communicative action.*

For me now, the question of my authenticity and integrity are at “centre stage in determining the merit and truth value” (O’Dea, 1994: 100) of my research. As much as I would like to do so, I am not basing my claim to ‘truth’ on the quality of the language and forms of narrative that I use. Whatever literary or rhetorical criteria I have used in my representation in this thesis are at the service of my efforts to improve the quality of my practice as an action research educator, as I come to know my spirituality through using dialectical criteria. My truth, my honesty, my integrity are dependent for their realisation on my being able, in this thesis, to show how I understand my personal and professional relationships with others through my radical call to my self of personal freedom, involving freedom from restraint and fear and the freedom to realise my ‘true’ self, linked to the value of love I show towards teachers and others. As I am attempting to do this, I feel however, that I have also produced an account that has some literary merit.

#### *Using methodological standards of judgment/standards of rigour*

Let me initially take up Winter’s criteria of methodological rigour (1989: 38-70). His first principle is that of *reflexive critique* (pp. 39-46). Rather than calling on universally agreed categories, I make modest claims in my research. I make judgments based on my varied personal experiences. I analyse them, but know these aren’t and will never be, what constitutes the final analysis. My action research process involves questioning my claims in validation sessions. The results of my research are therefore open to dialogue between me and

my reader regarding the explanations I offer of my experience. I feel I have an obligation, however, to offer my own explanations, but I don't want to thrust these on my reader as matters of certainty.

In his principle of *dialectic critique* (pp. 46-55), Winter understands this principle as he considers himself as a product of a social world which itself is structured as a series of contradictions. While not ignoring the social world of contradictions, I prefer to concentrate on the fact that I, myself, am a living contradiction. I hold values but deny them in my practice which, in turn, motivates me to negate my contradiction.

Winter's principle of *collaborative resource* (pp. 55-59) means that I take everyone's point of view into account as a resource for understanding the various situations portrayed in my thesis. However, I hold that the final synthesis has to be mine. I endeavour to give full recognition and respect, however, to all the points of view that are aired, even though I make the final choice.

Regarding the principle of *risk* (pp. 60-62), I put myself at risk by allowing myself to be questioned by the taken-for-granted processes I use in order to function and cope with difficult situations. I leave myself open to contradictions of my viewpoints which, in turn, enable me to open up the extent of my explanations as I move along in my research.

My action research process involves "*differences, contradictions, possibilities and questions*" (Winter, 1989: 62) in its *plural structure* (pp. 62-65). The multiplicity of viewpoints are shown both in the form of representation of my thesis and in how I create my own living theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation (Winter, 1998). I have used both intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues to help me understand my own meaning-making, and have interspersed them with 'imaginary dialogues', and an interior monologue.

Winter's final principle is about *theory, practice, transformation* (pp. 65-67). According to Winter (ibid), theory questions practice and

practice questions theory. Winter says that theory may evolve from practice, but for myself, I unequivocally maintain that I evolve theory from my practice so that both my theory and my practice - from which my theory evolves - are intimately related.

While finding Winter's principles of rigour helpful and useful, they are still for me, 'outsider principles', that is, principles not designed specifically for my thesis. I prefer 'insider principles,' ones that grow from my thesis as it were, just as my theory grows from my practice. My principles of rigour, my methodological standards of judgment, are specifically about offering my thesis as a disciplined description that integrates both an 'intra' and an 'inter'- dialectic. The 'intra'-personal dialogues I conduct with myself enable me to understand my meaning-making for myself. The 'inter'-personal dialogues I conduct with others, including my reader, enable me to represent my meaning-making to them. Both the 'intra'-personal and the 'inter'-personal dialectics involve question and answer, contradictions and tensions, which help to move me forward through my imagined possibilities, my actions and evaluation of them, and through the action research enquiry cycles (see the Whitehead action research cycle above, p. 16).

#### 4. My form of representation

I understand representation to mean how I transform what's in my consciousness into a public form so that I can analyse and share it with the reader (Eisner, 1993). I know I will never be able to capture directly what's in my consciousness, but I attempt to create its contents in a form that is comprehensible to me and to the reader. I construct my form of representation in my thesis in a subjective way, realising that it is "*a distinctively human process through which researchers make knowledge*" (Marshall, 1995: 25). Following Marshall, I work with an 'aware' and 'critical subjectivity' in which I am both in and observing myself in my research and learning also from validation sessions with others.

Eisner (1993) argues that we need to find different ways of representing different meanings because different ways of representing allow for different forms of understanding to be shared (p. 6). He argues that we should be exploring the significance of the forms of understanding that poetry, literature, dance, music, mathematics and literal language make possible. In responding to Eisner's ideas about forms of representation, I consider the importance to my thesis of my creating my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation, which I represent in my 'intra' and 'inter'-personal dialogues using an expressive mode of representation. Following Macmurray (1935/1992: xiii), I call my expressive mode of representation emotional rationality.

One way in which Macmurray characterised emotional rationality was in a BBC broadcast in the 1930's (in Macmurray, 1935: xiii), when he declared that:

*we know reality (and know it even more comprehensively) in our emotional engagement with it ... we need to free up our emotions so that we might relate to reality - including other persons - more genuinely and fully.*

Macmurray (1935/1992: 22) distinguished between intellectual and emotional knowledge when he said that:

*Intellectual knowledge tells us about the world. It gives us knowledge about things, not knowledge of them. It does not reveal the world as it is. Only emotional knowledge can do that.*

In my representation of my personal and professional relationships through my 'intra' and my 'inter'-personal dialogues I often use emotion. It helps me to show concern for myself and for others as persons. According to Goleman (1996: xii), emotional intelligence embraces zeal and persistence and the ability to motivate oneself, and leads towards one's moral instincts in one's relationship with others. He says it is to do with

*the ability to read emotions in others; lacking a sense of another's need or despair, there is no caring.*



My feelings are the moral agents that motivate me in my caring, compassion and empathy which are essential ingredients of my relationships with others. Below is what I said on one occasion (Taylor *et al*, in press):

*I rarely hesitate to appropriate and to absorb emotional, affective ideas, because I feel I have lived with them, interiorly and exteriorly, all my life. They are a lifetime's house-guests, guests of my interior which I call home. They are familiar. I don't have to doff my hat to them, be polite in their presence. It's not that they own me or that I am beholden to them, even when I allow them to disport themselves, as they sometimes will. My instincts trust them. They have always been my touchstones to reality, the real guides to my life.*

At the same time, I do not attempt to oppose one form of rationality with another, the intellectual with the emotional. Rather, I attempt to use both and link them with the synthesising capacity of my 'I' as I use both a propositional and felt form of language within a dialectic of relationship with others.

#### *Eisner's 'expressive mode' as a form of representation*

I feel that Eisner's (1994) expressive mode of representation incorporates my use of improvisatory self-realisation, including emotional rationality. Eisner (1994: 52) explains the 'expressive mode' thus:

*By expressive, I mean that what is represented is not the surface features of the object or event, but, rather, its deep structure or, in other words, its expressive character.*

According to Eisner (*ibid*), there are no rules or codes I can use to represent the expressive mode. However, I don't want to imitate the surface features of what I observe, I don't want to imitate things seen, but to reveal, to imitate things felt:

*At least part of the reason is because much of what is most important in human experience is not what is apparent, but, instead, what is felt about what is apparent. Things are not always what they appear to be on the surface. They need to be*

*seen in terms of the kind of emotional life that they generate.*

I want to use an expressive mode of representation not simply because it may have a pleasant effect on my readers or, because I want to dress up the content of my form of representation in a way that makes it more palatable. Rather, following Elsner (1994: 53), I believe that the expressive mode of treatment, *"is itself part and parcel of the content of the form of representation."* For me, at least some of the situations represented in my thesis are emotionally loaded situations for myself and others. If I can't find an expressive mode through which to represent these situations, I feel I would distort or misrepresent them and could be accused of prejudice, of bias. If that happened my desire to show my care and concern for others, thus helping to set them free from whatever inhibits them, would be shown to be false.

### *My use of narrative*

In my Abstract above I say that *"My thesis is a narrative ...."* It is with narrative that I now wish to deal. According to Hickey (1993: 188), narrative follows the pattern of: *"This happened, then that, (and so on), conclusion."* McClure (1996: 280) expands on this idea when she says that the sequential pattern of:

*I did this, then I did that involves making links backwards and forwards over a story which is, moreover, still in the telling .... (It) involve(s) a kind of retrospective search for the prospective significance of events and decisions ....*

Ricoeur (In Kearney, 1984: 21-22) argues that though narration may order the past for me, it doesn't close off what is new. In fact it preserves meaning from the past so that it may have meaning in the present and future. Here is how he puts it:

*The structure of narrativity demonstrates that it is by trying to put order on our past, by retelling and recounting what has been, that we acquire an identity. These two orientations - towards the future and towards the past - are not, however, incompatible. As Heidegger himself points out, the notion of 'repeating'*

*(Wiederholung) the past is inseparable from the existential projection of ourselves towards our possibilities.*

My narration will always be more ordered, coherent and unified than the way I actually live my life. Narration, then, is a creative device for making meaning. Here below is how Ricoeur (p. 22) puts it:

*There is always more order in what we narrate than in what we have actually already lived; and this narrative excess (surcroît) of order, coherence and unity, is a prime example of the creative power of narration.*

Ely *et al* (1991: 67) helps me to understand what I'm doing when I am creating a text, or thesis. It is about bringing to life those I am learning about, namely myself, teachers and others including, for me, my God:

*Your job is to create a text in which the person or persons you learn about come to life. This means that you have a tremendous responsibility to be true to their meanings. The written presentation is of crucial importance: in a deep sense, what one writes is what happened and what was learned.*

I create a text in which I depict some part of the lives of various people, particularly my own. In doing so I have a responsibility, Ely *et al* (*ibid*) remind me, to be 'true' to their meanings.

But another problem surfaces too. There is a difference between my accounts as stories, and fictional accounts. In reading fictional accounts I typically and deliberately waive the existence or non-existence of the persons, places and events mentioned. I can't do that, however, with my accounts in my various chapters in this thesis, which I'm quite happy to call stories. Eisner (1997: 5) says that:

*We tell stories. Stories have particular features. Stories instruct, they reveal, they inform in special ways.*

But because my stories arose out of my relationship with various live people, I can't and don't invent imaginary characters, events and places. The characters, events and places are 'real'. They are 'real'

because they exist, I know them, I have seen them face-to-face, I like them, I enjoy them. The conversations between others and myself that I've quoted in my thesis are real, though I have anonymised them whenever requested to do so by those concerned. At the same time, I accept Ely *et al*'s (1991: 167) point to some extent at least that, *"in a deep sense, what one writes is what happened and what was learned."*

I have raised what is 'real' a few times. Now I raise it again but within the context of Evans's (1998: 53) own question this time: *"whose reality is a story?"* When the reader reads what I've written, Evans says, they'll reconstruct and reinterpret reality and alternatives from their own perspectives. She poses the idea that *"there is no reality for the story, and therefore, perhaps, it does not belong to the characters."* Evans also reminds me that Winter (1988: 236), in discussing 'reality' in story, talked of the *"plurality of voices."* By that he meant the characters in the story, different voices within the character, and different levels of *"authorial comment (implicit and explicit)."* All these interact according to Evans (1998: 53):

*to offer the reader the opportunity to interpret the text according to his or her own experiences, values, attitudes and predilections.*

Evans also points out that the reader can ask questions of the contradictions which arise from the story. They can, in Brecht's (1974: 277) words, *"make dialectics a source of enjoyment."*

Stories contain, therefore, a plurality of voices and a form of self exploration (Evans, 1998: 53). Reading my stories, the reader will, for example, need to interpret them because of the inconsistencies and contradictions they find in them. So the reader fills in meaning, and does so by reference to their own experiences. But in doing so, they will, according to Iser (1974: 132-133), reveal themselves *"in order to experience a reality which is different from (their) own."* So not only does the reader *"conduct a creative examination of the text,"* but also of themselves (ibid: 145). Evans raises the interesting idea that the reader in attempting to make sense of the gaps left by me has to confront their own thoughts about their own practices and

experiences. Couldn't confronting their own thoughts about their lives and practices, raise anger within the reader because they are faced with reformulating their view of themselves? And couldn't they direct their anger, instead, at me the writer in order "*to compensate for feelings of insecurity or annoyance which arise as a result of confronting oneself?*" Couldn't they do it also in order to avoid dealing with the "*creative examination, not only of the text,*" but also, of themselves? (Evans, 1998: 54).

What is most borne in on me is that my interpretation of my stories isn't the only possible one. There are many different ways of seeing things. Nevertheless, I feel I have an obligation to let the reader know how I view my own stories. I maintain, for example, that my stories have helped me to know how I have passionately answered a radical call to my self of personal freedom, involving freedom from restraint and fear and the freedom to realise my 'true' self, linked to the value of love I show towards teachers and others in my thesis.

As writer, then, I have my story to tell, a story that is embedded in my culture, in my beliefs, in my life history, and particularly, in my personal and professional relationship with others, involving the values of freedom and love. I use the various dialogues in my stories to help me to negotiate meanings in my relationship with myself and others. They are what enables me to understand language by entering what Barthes (1988: 158) describes as the "*kitchen of meaning,*" where I "*struggle with a certain innocence of objects,*" acknowledging the complexities of language and of that which I tend to take for granted. It is the kind of situation in which I am, with others, called to confront the fact that "*what everybody knows*" is all too often not what everybody knows. (Witherell and Noddings: 1991: 7).

I maintain that there are many instances of genuine dialogue in this thesis - as well as instances of failed dialogue. There are instances in which I believe good connections are made, but there are also instances in which there is only sad separation. Nevertheless, these dialogues are what contributes to my meaning-making in this thesis. In saying this, however, I accept the right of the reader to do their

own meaning making in their own way.

#### 4. Introducing those with whom I have been conversing

Among the writers whom I cite in my thesis, I know only one who is 'dearer to me than myself' (Hanson, 1986: 133). He is Thomas Merton, the famous American Trappist monk. While I never met him I feel I have 'known' him almost since I entered religious community life as a brother in 1957. So he is the only writer I will include here. There is Larry whom I knew better and for longer than anybody else. He was a fellow religious brother who died in 1995. His death had a profound effect on me and told me how I might live a better and more productive life. In his life and, even more, in the manner of his death I experienced many of those values by which I wanted to live my life. In connection with the issue of 'conflict' in chapter 5, I introduce myself rather than the other protagonists, as the issue is mine alone to resolve.

I wish to offer a cameo, a short descriptive sketch, of the work of each person together with some phrase from the people themselves which, for me, illustrates at least one facet of what they are interested in. I do not intend by this form of representation to reduce any of those concerned to this brief sketch of their work or lives. I intend only to offer a 'taster', a lingering sense of their importance, as we move into greater engagement with them in their respective places in the thesis itself.

I first introduce my chapters, from 2 to 6, and their subject matter, followed by the names of the persons I wish to talk about.

#### Chapter 2

*How have I educatively influenced and, in turn, been educatively influenced in my role as a professional educator to a teacher, that teacher becoming an action research tutor to her teacher colleague, one of whose pupils writes about her own concerns?*

## *Marion*

In chapter 1, Marion is a senior English teacher, teaching in a girls' secondary school on the north side of Dublin. She has at the time of the enquiry been teaching for eighteen years in the same school and did her very first action enquiry the previous year, 1992-93. I was very touched by her declaration to me on audio tape in 1993 (19th April) about what she wanted her own own students to experience from her:

*When I was growing up both at home and at school .... we were not encouraged to speak up for ourselves. When I left school - there is no other word for it - I was voiceless. I determined when I became a teacher that my students should be able to give their opinions and state how they feel.*

So through wanting to develop personal and social confidence in her first year students (thirteen-year-olds), she evolved her then enquiry question:

*How can I change the style of my teaching in my first year English class, so as to improve the quality of the educational experience for my students?*

The 'voice' she gave her students was the same 'voice' and encouragement she offered her teaching colleague, Valerie.

## *Valerie*

Valerie, Marion's teaching colleague, is an R.E. teacher who has been teaching in the same school for about six years. The previous year, 1992-93, she had acted as a 'critical friend' to Marion in her action enquiry.

Her enquiry question was the following:

*How can I use my practice with my pupils to show the relevance of Religious Education for them?*

At the end of her enquiry she had little doubt as to who gained most: *"I feel I am the one who did most of the learning in the classroom. When I read my report it seems as if I always knew where I was going. I definitely did not."* She was loud in her praise for her colleague, Marion: *"In December and January I could not see where I was going. I had lost my vision. I was blind, fumbling in the dark. I wanted to give up. Marion always had a vision and perspective on where I was at."* Of the enquiry itself, she had this to say: *"I have had an extraordinary experience in my research this year and now feel like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, compelled to relate my story to anyone who will listen"* and *"I look forward to teaching 5:33 as sixth years - something I dreaded last October."*

Rose

Valerie's fifteen-year old student, Rose, who had been encouraged by Valerie to write about her own concerns at my request, lost no time in finding her own 'voice'. She says that:

*there should be room for all views as all people are unique and individual. I think the emphasis should be on personal development rather than moral (development) because a developed person is better able to side with something which they have chosen rather than what has been enforced on them.*

### Chapter 3

*What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with 'John'?*

John

John is an experienced secondary teacher, teaching for about twenty years, in a large (700-student) all-boys' secondary college in a small rural town in Ireland. When we were chatting about his values on 3rd March, 1995, John spoke with passion about what was important to him in his teaching:



*How can I be as caring as possible? I think so often I can become constricted by settling into a role. So I want to care for students, they are persons. I suppose too there would be the value of democracy. But it's not just democracy, it's really listening to them, really listening to what's coming from their worlds and to, in some way, encourage them to realise that they can help shape their own world.*

Regarding what action research had done for himself, he said that: "I think I have experienced liberation, I have experienced more excitement in my teaching and bringing myself more alive in my work. I think I would feel really stuck in a rut if I wasn't doing research."

#### Chapter 4

*How do I enable 'David' to master his fears concerning discipline through offering him challenging questions that will excite his imagination towards using creative solutions?*

*David*

I enter into an educative relationship with 'David' who is an experienced teacher of 25 years standing in a small, Irish rural, 'mixed' (boys and girls) secondary school of 270 students and 18 teachers. I daren't refuse to take David seriously when I hear him say:

*I hope that what I have written is of value and can be taken seriously!*

I was touched by it and immediately wrote in my journal:

*Was David telling me some of his history, albeit a sad part, perhaps of neglect by others of his work and even of himself? If so, I daren't turn my back on his plea. Rather than feeling desolate, I wish David to end up feeling good about himself, good about what he has achieved. This is a test of my humanity, of my efforts to respect and value him! (5th February, 1995).*

#### Chapter 5

*How do I explore and explain the nature of a professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at a college of education and come to a knowledge of how to resolve it as I exercise my leadership 'differently'?*

*Ben*

As I explore my leadership, and conflict within it, I gradually understand how I am coming to a strong sense of my own identity and integrity. This involves learning to be myself despite, or perhaps because of, opposition. Some of this learning is internal in that I become tender and caring towards myself and my own needs. Some of it involves rejecting conformity and becoming assertive as I struggle to become free to control my own life.

*What is distinctive about me as a human being is my consciousness not only of others as human beings but of myself. I have a sense of my own unity as a person (albeit embracing contradictions and opposites), of my own worth and dignity, of my own capacity to think through a problem, to persevere when things get tough, to establish my own values and beliefs whereby I can exercise some control over my own destiny (Pring, 1988: 43-4)*

## Chapter 6

*What is the significance of the 'living' spiritual ideas of Tom Merton and others to my action enquiry about how I relate to myself and others?*

*Tom (Merton)*

In his journal, November 28, 1960, he wrote:

*Struggle in my heart all week. My own moral conflict never ceases. Knowing I cannot and must not simply submit to the standards imposed on me, and merely conform as "they" would like. This I am convinced is wrong - but the pressure never ceases. It takes every possible form. But it is not obedience. I will do what they tell me, but I will not and cannot think as they think. If I did I would be untrue to God, to myself, and to all*

*those who for some reason or other have a kind of confidence in me* (in Kramer, 1996: 70).

Like Merton, I too have struggled to hold to my sense of being authentic while also being accountable to my religious leaders. I have struggled with understanding how I can be a leader. I am now preparing for a leadership role that is a consciously ethical one. While continuing to be accountable to my religious authorities, I am construing my vow of obedience differently - as a vow *for partnership* (O Murchu, 1995: 114). I believe I can now work at helping my religious authorities to see accountability as a gift we can offer each another!

### *Larry*

Larry was a fellow religious brother who died in September, 1995. A few weeks prior to that I went to see him and he admitted that:

*Yes, I have cancer. I have been given three months to live but I may die sooner. Funny, it wasn't until a past pupil commented that I had lost a lot of weight that I found out...*

I was astounded by the matter-of-factness with which he had accepted the inevitability of his own death shortly. He was ready. He was satisfied with how he had led his life. He had accomplished what he had set out to do. Since coming to live in Bath between 1995 and 1998, I have learnt from the death of my friend, Larry, that I need to concentrate on the *"time-left-to-live."*

## **Chapter 2**

**How have I educatively influenced and, in turn, been educatively influenced in my role as a teacher educator to a teacher, that teacher becoming an action research tutor to her teacher colleague, one of whose pupils writes about her own concerns?**

The chapter is divided into two sections as follows:

### **Section One**

**Influencing Marion and being influenced by her**

### **Section Two**

**Influencing Valerie and her pupils and being influenced by them**

At the end of *Section One* there is a page break. *Section Two*, preceded by its own *Summary*, then follows.

*Who the participants are*

**Marion** is a senior English teacher, teaching in a girls' secondary school on the north side of Dublin. She has at the time of her enquiry in this chapter been teaching for eighteen years in the same school and did her very first action enquiry the previous year, 1992-93. Through wanting to develop personal and social confidence in her first year students (thirteen-year-olds), she evolved her then enquiry question: "*How can I change the style of my teaching in my first year English class, so as to improve the quality of the educational experience for my students?*"

**Valerie**, Marion's teaching colleague, is an R.E. teacher who has been teaching in the same school for about six years. The previous year, 1992-93, she had acted as a 'critical friend' to Marion in her

action enquiry.

**Rose**, a senior student of Valerie's, at my instigation, is encouraged by Valerie to write about her own concern(s).

### Section One

#### *Influencing Marion and being influenced by her*

Summary 1 In our educative relationship I work at relating to Marion as I try to persuade her to support her colleague, Valerie, in Valerie's action research enquiry.

In proposing questions for Marion's use with Valerie, I base them on the imaginative and imaginary dialogue she composed and gave to me. I believe it will be easier for her to 'own' the questions she will use with Valerie because of their prior derivation from her communication with me. Marion changes them to 'suit' Valerie. In so doing, she exercises her independence and autonomy, values that she had originally told me she cherished.

At the end of section one I explain that my educative relationship with Marion is one of care which for me is a legitimate anxiety to ensure that those with whom I am relating are as free from fears - known or unknown - as is humanly possible.

### My early educative relationship with Marion

I want to briefly refer to my early (1992-93) educative relationship with Marion in order to pinpoint the values Marion enunciated as guiding principles for her life in education.

In one of these early conversations concerning her values (19.4.93), I remember Marion saying:

*When I was growing up both at home and at school, as I said to you before, we were not encouraged to speak up for ourselves. When I left school, there is no other word for it, I was voiceless. I determined when I became a teacher that my students should be able to give their opinions and state how they feel ....*

From that moment onwards she wanted her educational endeavours to be about helping her pupils to be able to voice their own opinions; and she also wanted to create a democratic framework within which this could happen. These measures would enable her students to have the opportunity to move towards independence, something she felt she was denied when she herself was young.

In the same conversation I asked Marion if she would be prepared to include the voices of her pupils in her report (1992-93) and to show it to them:

*Ben        Would you say they should see the report?*

*Marion    The whole thing?*

*Ben        Yes.*

*Marion    Well, I have no objection to it .... I wonder are they old enough to realise long-term, the benefit, d'you know what I mean?*

*Ben        I think you won't know that unless you take a risk - as you've done with a lot of things already. It would be interesting what they'd say about that particular report, how they value you putting their voices in it .... If you do, then it's their report as well as yours.*

*Marion    Oh yes, well, I'll give it a go, Ben, okay?*

In her subsequent report (1992-93) Marion said: *"The girls were 'surprised' and 'pleased' that I presented the report to them."* She went on to add: *"Hopefully, in the future, I will be more focused on the students than on the texts, as was my previous practice, I suspect."* I was pleased. Marion had told me that she wanted to develop personal and social confidence in her first year students (thirteen-year-olds) because of her perception that, when she left school, she was as she said, *"voiceless."* She determined then that: *"when I became a teacher that my students should be able to give their opinions and state how they felt."* It was out of her experiences that she evolved her then enquiry question which is as follows: *"How can I change the style of my teaching in my first year English class, so to improve the quality of the educational experience for my students?"* In challenging Marion's own educative and personal values, I feel I enabled her to reflect on how she might improve the communication skills of her students. In any case she felt that her report showed that her students were *"able to give their opinions and state how they felt."* And Marion also felt that she had also come to value her students more as unique individuals.

#### Marion reexamines her values

Marion sent me a 'Me-Self Dialogue' on 24th November 1993. This dialogue was Marion's way of initiating her action enquiry for the school year, 1993-94. Prior to that time I had asked her to think about becoming an action research tutor. I never spelt out for Marion what I felt a 'tutor' might do. I was content that in our conversations over time, she would find out how she could help Valerie to improve what she was doing in her classroom. Marion's dialogue was an imaginary one between 'Me' and 'Self.' She never explained what she meant by 'Me' and 'Self' and I never thought to ask. I was more interested in the content of what she had to say. In my reply (26th November, 1993) I showed how greatly I appreciated its creativity and effectiveness:

*I loved the way you decided to use a dialogic form for articulating*

*your concerns about being a supporter. It's very creative and effective. I found it very stimulating. It's a very effective way of writing, isn't it?*

In her 'Dialogue' Marion speaks about how her action enquiry of the previous year (1992-'93) had rejuvenated her, had caused her to reexamine her values and to work towards negating whatever denial of values she experienced in her classroom:

*Me I was convinced of its relevance and importance for me in my professional development. It made me focus on my values and examine my classroom practice in the light of these values.*

*Self This all sounds a bit vague and pretentious. What 'values' did you discover you had?*

*Me I learned that I wanted my classroom to be a happy, democratic place, where the pupils and I would learn and discover together. I wanted to empower them to be able to participate confidently in class discussions. I learned that I must listen more and talk less. I learned that a good rapport between the students and myself could not exist without mutual trust, understanding and respect. I hope that I always had these values but they can become cloudy over the years. I think I was guilty of labelling the students.*

*Self Labelling?*

*Me Yes, treating them as groups who were academically 'bright' or 'weak'. It's a dangerous practice to mentally group people together without taking into consideration their individual and unique qualities.*

### *I have been influential*

I now know that I have been influential in Marion's examination of her values. She felt that a good rapport between the students and herself couldn't exist without mutual trust, understanding and respect. In the following extract (Tape, 19th April, 1993), Marion talks about her efforts to keep her pupils at the centre of her enquiry and parallels it with the quality of my help to her:



*Marion    The way you were trying to treat me was actually the way I was trying to treat the children.*

*Ben        Is that so?*

*Marion    Person-centred and so on.*

*Ben        The importance of that actually occurred to me.*

*Marion    And that the other person is unique.*

*Ben        That's right.*

I was glad to have got a clear endorsement that I had consciously set out to treat Marion as unique and that she had noticed it.

### *I encourage*

In my reply (26th November, 1993) to Marion's 'Me-Self Dialogue', I wanted to let her know how deeply I welcomed her imaginative dialogue and to endorse her conviction that she had learnt a huge amount about her values from doing her previous (1992-1993) action research enquiry:

*I like the way you are sure of your values now, ones like wanting your "classroom to be a happy democratic place" where you wanted your pupils "to participate confidently in class discussions" and that "a good rapport" couldn't exist "without mutual trust, understanding and respect." I like the way you want to eschew "labelling" and to concentrate on your pupils' "individual and unique qualities."*

I wanted also to encourage Marion to take up a new role, that of tutor, to a colleague on her own staff. I never specified what the role of tutor should be. I felt it wasn't a collection of skills to be enquired; that it had more to do with establishing relationship with others in ways that encouraged and inspired them. I felt confidence in Marion that she would be able to do so once she got over her temporary lack of confidence in herself. In order to inspire confidence in her I emphasised that her values weren't really new-found; that she always had them but was perhaps rediscovering them. The important thing was that she was overtly practising them. All of this,

I felt, would give her courage and convince her of her ability to take on her new role. Here is what I said:.

*I'm not surprised you want to share the exciting classroom experiences you have had with Valerie. More than that I think you have rediscovered a lot of qualities, values, etc., you always had but perhaps had not had an experience of reflecting on until last year. I detect also a new-found confidence in your own abilities. I say: rejoice in that. (my reply, 26th November, 1993).*

### I listen carefully

As I listen very carefully to what Marion had said in the earlier part of her Dialogue, I continue to do so in the next part as well. She tells me that she wants to feel in 'control' of what she's doing. The role of teaching is defined: even if she agreed to become a tutor might she be seen as 'a know-all'? As she said:

*Me        I am a bit worried. What if I'm not able for it? What if I don't possess the necessary skills to help Valerie in her research? The unknown can be a bit scary. The feeling of not being in control makes me nervous.*

*Self      What do you mean by 'out of control'?*

*Me        Working with the students is non-threatening. Roles are clearly defined. Working with a colleague is totally different. How can I help Valerie without appearing a know-all? What if I cannot answer her questions and appear an utter fool? .... I hope I can be a good listener. What if, in my enthusiasm, I try to speak for Valerie, putting words in her mouth? Or what if I misinterpret what she is about?*

In replying to Marion I want to show her that I have heard, that I take her reservations seriously, that I am trying to empathise with her as deeply as I can. She had told me the previous year, "*I trust you implicitly, Ben.*" I instinctively feel, therefore, that when she hears her fears being mirrored to her by me, she will feel that maybe they are not as substantial as she first feared. She will know that she is capable of transcending these fears she holds. Here below then, is my reply:

*I find myself empathising with your fears about appearing to be "a fool or a know-all", and also about wanting to be a good listener and not wanting to put words into Valerie's mouth or even misinterpreting what she is about.*

### Acknowledging vulnerability and offering challenge

In the next part of her Dialogue, Marion raises her insecurities:

**Self**      *Can you not avoid that (misinterpretation) by constant dialogue and discussion with Valerie? Can you let her know of your fears?*

**Me**        *Yes, but will that not make her sceptical? How can I support her and give her confidence if I'm feeling insecure myself?*

I thank Marion for acknowledging her fears but I also wish to persuade her to accept the new challenge of becoming an action research tutor. I hope my efforts at persuasion will convince her of her ability to do so. I do so by raising the issue of her past success as an action researcher. I want to let her know that I recognised her experience at, and continued potential for, taking risks:

*I like the way you admitted your insecurities and I think I picked up that you would be willing to talk to Valerie about these even if you wondered if this would make her sceptical and doubtful of your capacity to support her, given what you consider to be your apparent lack of confidence. I suppose it's a question of finding out by admitting your vulnerabilities - and leaving the judgment to Valerie. I think it represents another risk but then you have already undertaken many of these in your action research project last year - and they worked. I know it's a cliché to say it, but success seems to build on success.*

### Preparing for uncertainty and the unexpected

In the next extract from Marion's Dialogue given below, she talks about how she went about trying to allay Valerie's fears. I am taking 'allay' to mean: to diminish, to relieve, to alleviate. Marion's 'Self' in

her Dialogue puts the question, 'Were you able to allay her fears?' There's a ring of confidence about her, even if tinged with caution too:

*Self        Were you able to allay her fears?*

*Me         A little. I told her that as she proceeded, things would become clearer and that it was impossible to forecast problems or possible solutions or certainly not the outcome, at the start of her enquiry. I assured her that I had the same misgivings when I started last year. Any action enquiry is ongoing and sometimes the unexpected will occur.*

In my reply (26th November, 1993), I was pleased that Marion intended to prepare Valerie for uncertainty and for the 'unexpected.'

*Action research offers the opportunity to communicate*

*Self        What is the real point of it all?*

*Me         I think that it is vitally important for colleagues to be able to discuss their individual concerns .... The people who best understand teachers' concerns are other teachers, in my opinion. At least, that has been my experience with action research .... The students, our raison d'etre, are the real beneficiaries.*

*Self        You said yourself that collaboration worked well for you last year. Maybe that's what it's all about. All of us feel inadequate at times but by talking things over and teasing out the problems, we can help each other to grow.*

Marion, speaking from her experience, also emphasised how important it was for teachers to be able to talk openly to one another about their frustrations, their concerns, their disillusionments. She felt action research was very powerful in that it catered for individual needs. Marion's openness to the potential of action research would, I felt, help her to tutor her colleague, Valerie.

In my reply to Marion, I asked her to consider letter writing as an additional form of communicating. I believed it would enrich our

understanding of our enquiries and of ourselves. And I went on to point out what I saw as some of its advantages: *"It would provide material .... for us to discuss when we meet. It would push both of us - and, hopefully, Valerie, forward in our learning."*

### *I examine a section of Marion's Dialogue*

Now I wanted to see in what practical way I could help Marion as she struggled to 'fit' herself into her new role as action research tutor to Valerie. Below I choose a section of Marion's Dialogue, a section that deals with issues Valerie brought to Marion's attention. Having picked out certain words and phrases (underlined) that resonated with me as being important both from Marion's, Valerie's and my points of view, I follow it on subsequent pages with the kinds of questions I formulated. I then offered these to Marion as a help to her as she continued to help Valerie to move forward with her enquiry. Here below is the relevant section of Marion's Dialogue:

- Self      What is Valerie's project about?*
- Me        She is concerned about the relevance of religious studies for her students. She feels that many of them regard Religion as a second class subject. She often feels frustrated by their seeming indifference. She feels deprived of feedback.*
- Self      What does she mean by feedback?*
- Me        The rest of us who teach the so-called more academic subjects get feedback from the state examinations. If we're lucky we can even get recognition and appreciation from the students themselves.*
- Self      She feels at times somewhat demoralised then which is perfectly understandable. We all need to be recognised for our efforts. This is what keeps us motivated.*
- Me        Precisely.*
- Self      How does she feel about teaching English? Is this a much different experience for her?*
- Me        I haven't asked her yet but I will.*

- Self** *I think she would need to consider that question as part of her background. Do other teachers of Religion have the same misgivings as Valerie has?*
- Me** *That's a good question. Maybe I should suggest to Valerie that she interviews the other members of the Religion Team in school.*
- Self** *Yes, because that would give her a better idea of the overall picture in regard to the teaching of Religion. You can propose that idea but what if she rejects it?*
- Me** *Well obviously, it is only a suggestion and I must give Valerie the autonomy to act on her own instincts. This is what I see as true collaboration.*
- Self** *So, where do you go from here?*
- Me** *I will continue to meet and talk with Valerie and offer her any support and encouragement I can. I will also need the advice and support of Ben in my endeavour. I need to talk to other members of my staff and tell them what we are about and listen to their comments and suggestions too.*
- Self** *Where does Valerie go from here?*
- Me** *Valerie has decided to question her fifth year Religion classes to find out their attitudes to their religious instruction .... Given the abstract nature of her enquiry, she is worried about how she will gather her evidence and interpret it.*

### *I formulate questions based on Marion's Dialogue*

Because Marion - towards the end of her Dialogue above - said she needed my "advice and support," I decided to study the above section of her Dialogue carefully and then compose some questions that I thought would enable her to continue to help Valerie to move forward. I felt that basing them on her own words from her imaginary dialogue would enhance the quality of them in her eyes. Because the questions were based on her words, I felt that very fact should give her courage to support her colleague, Valerie. It would also be my acknowledgement of her expertise in action research and her ability to offer Valerie support. In any case here are my first two questions:

- \* *Why is Valerie frustrated?*
- \* *What form does her frustration take?*

I realised, of course, that Marion had indicated Valerie's answer to the first question when she said: "*She (Valerie) often feels frustrated by their (her pupils') seeming indifference.*" I return to 'indifference' below in my set of questions. Now reviewing my first two questions, however, I do not seem to have formulated them very well. I struggled to say what I meant and had to form further questions in order to do so. What I really wanted to get at was why Valerie should feel upset at her pupil's 'seeming indifference' unless R.E. meant something to her that she felt it didn't perhaps mean to her pupils. What I was still trying to find out was Valerie's motivation: what was the relevance of R.E. to her?:

- \* *What does she (Valerie) mean by 'relevance'?*
- \* *Could you ask her what the relevance of Religion is to her? That will provide one bit of evidence I think.*

Although Marion had also talked in this section about the notion of Valerie interpreting her evidence, I felt it could be left until later. It is important but not immediate. At this point, I was wondering if Valerie would perhaps detect a discrepancy between what she now believed after considering and reflecting on the relevance of R.E., and how she was getting that across, how she was teaching it. If that happened, well then she would have a 'reason' for wanting to change something! I strongly felt also, that Valerie's own self-reflections, while very important, were but part of the overall concern. She might very well feel that she 'knew' exactly what her pupils should value from R.E. I felt, however, that she needed to find a way of canvassing their views about R.E. too. Hence my next question:

- \* *What's its relevance to her students? That will provide another bit of evidence.*

I felt Valerie should have the opportunity, before moving ahead, of offering evidence for her contention "*that many of her students regard R.E. as a second class subject.*" In doing so, I felt that she would also

be starting to take an enquiry approach, looking for evidence. Here below are the questions I suggested:

- \* *You also mention Valerie as feeling that many of her students regard R.E. as a second class subject.*
- \* *What's the evidence for this?*
- \* *Could she describe it in some detail?*
- \* *In what ways are her students indifferent?*

Because Marion herself had posed a question in her Dialogue above about 'feedback' for Valerie, I felt a question including that 'feedback' would be useful. As Marion pointed out, teachers teaching what she called the 'so-called' academic subjects got feedback from the state examinations. They might even, as she pointed out, "*get recognition and appreciation from the students themselves.*" And she rightly pointed out that Valerie at times felt demoralised because her efforts got no recognition from the State. So it was clear that Valerie's students wouldn't be getting examination grades from the State. Because that wasn't available to her, I wondered what she would accept as an adequate 'reward' for her efforts? I realised, of course, that an answer to that question wouldn't perhaps come until towards the end of her research. However, I thought that highlighting it early on would be useful; something that she might begin to imagine! It therefore led to me asking the following question:

- \* *What kind of feedback would Valerie want? Could she imagine what she would like it to be?*

In my own mind I felt that asking questions about subjects other than R.E. might detract from the importance of concentrating on R.E. I didn't say so, however. I felt it was Marion's right to ask whatever questions she felt would be helpful. I felt that Marion knew that Valerie was 'successful' at teaching English and that referring to that 'success' would enable Valerie to perhaps realise that she could find a way, even if different, to duplicate this 'success' in her R.E. classes. Taking this approach was perhaps Marion's way also of being sensitive and empathic towards Valerie. I went along, therefore, with it in my next question:

- \* *I think asking Valerie the same questions about her English*



*class might provide an interesting contrast and might provide another way forward.*

Marion also wondered, in her Me-Self Dialogue if "*other teachers of Religion have the same misgivings as Valerie has?*" She felt it was a 'good question'. I have to say that I had mixed feelings about that particular idea because I felt Valerie's enquiry would begin to become unfocused and diffuse. Later, I brought my apprehension about it overtly to Marion's attention, but not here. I said:

- \* *I like the idea, Marion, of telling your other colleagues about what Valerie and yourself are trying to do and listening to "their comments and suggestions".*

Marion had told me in her Dialogue that: "*Valerie has decided to question her fifth year Religion classes to find out their attitudes to their religious instruction.*" I knew she had a number of classes and I felt she couldn't easily deal with making 'changes' in all of them. So, through Marion, I decided to put her a direct question about the criteria she would use. I also felt that she should discover, at least for herself, why she had made her choice, hence:

- \* *Did Valerie tell you what criteria she will use in deciding which R.E. class to work with and why?*

In her report, Marion acknowledged me as the source of the question about criteria when she said:

*It was Ben who had suggested that I ask Valerie what criteria she would use to decide which of the three groups on which to focus.*

But she flagged it as something that Valerie would attempt to answer when she was ready to do so.

When I gave all of the questions above to Marion I didn't offer the various rationales I have given here. To do so, I felt, would have bogged her down in unnecessary detail. She could always ask me why I had included a particular question; what I was thinking when I put it in, and so on. I also realised, of course, that there were too many

questions here for Marion. At the same time, I felt Marion would realise that I had chosen these questions carefully, based on what she herself had said in her imaginary dialogue. I intuited that they would feel 'familiar' to her. They were her type of questions. They had their origin first with her. And the questions I composed were but a menu from which Marion could pick and choose.

### Marion formulates her own questions

In her reply to me (30th November, 1993), Marion had formed her own questions to ask Valerie in order to move her forward in her action research cycle. Because she knew Valerie, I felt she was right to formulate her questions to 'suit' Valerie. Marion felt, however, that my reflective questions had helped her, "*pinpointing them for me*," as she said. She did talk, though, about finding "*less threatening questions*." She was, of course, right to do so. She knew and understood her colleague, Valerie. So Marion, speaking about my questions, says:

*The questions you posed were of great benefit to me and have shown me how to question Valerie. Your questioning of me and my questioning of Valerie will help the three of us to advance in our enquiries, hopefully.*

*Having studied your questions, I will pose them to Valerie .... or find less threatening questions such as:*

*What is the relevance of Religion to you? (evidence)  
What is its relevance to your students? (evidence)  
Do they, in fact, regard religion as a second-class subject?*

*At the moment Valerie is examining letters from her three classes, in which they are giving her their opinions, so this will be her evidence here.*

*You have decided to work with one group for your project.  
What criteria are you using to choose that group?  
What form does your frustration take?  
What kind of feedback from your students would you like to have?  
Do you feel differently about your role in English classes?  
Can you say why?*

*I think these questions will be of enormous help to Valerie ....  
Thanks for pinpointing them for me.*

*I help Marion to take control of her own learning*

It was fascinating for me to see what happened to the questions I originally offered to Marion to enable her to move Valerie forward. Marion took them and hardly changed them at all, despite (and rightfully so) her articulated desire to make them 'less threatening'. Perhaps she may have meant that she would have to decide in face-to-face meetings which questions she could and should ask at particular times. In her sensitivity to Valerie, too, she may need on the spot to change a question she had intended asking. In her report (May, 1994), though she offers a sample of the kinds of 'useful' questions she intended asking Valerie: "*What form does her frustration take?*" and "*What does she mean by relevance?*" They are recognisably two of those I formulated from her dialogue and which she had told me she, too, would be putting to Valerie.

I took seriously how helpful Marion found my questions when she said: "*The questions you posed were of great benefit to me.*" For me, it isn't that my questions per se were great questions, even the best question. It was that Marion said that "*they were of great benefit to me.*" I accept Marion's view that she has learned from me.

I believe that Marion's capacity for acting independently showed some of the nature of my educative relationship with her. Just as I wish to be in control of my own learning, so I was anxious that Marion should also be in control of her own learning. I didn't want to be domineering, dominating or possessive. One incident in particular brings to mind how independent in her learning Marion had become in her role as an action research tutor. I had written (30th November, 1993) to her that encouraging Valerie to talk to her R.E. colleagues about their 'misgivings' about R.E. might highlight a sense of hopelessness. In her reply on the same day, Marion said (ibid):

*The word "hopelessness" to me suggests despair, defeatism and a lost cause .... The word "misgivings" has surely a more gentle connotation; feelings of apprehension, uncertainty or doubt .... Valerie would not have decided to embark on an action research enquiry with this concern if she didn't feel that it would help her. So, that's not "hopelessness", is it? .... It certainly highlights the importance of words and our understanding of them, in our communications.*

I replied immediately, feeling rightly chastened. I realised that my vaunted hope about my own sense of care and empathy needed to be renewed. Marion's reply also reminded me that she was the teacher on the spot. She also gently told me to watch my language. I was being reminded that words can hurt and damage as well as heal! I learnt a great deal about Marion's own integrity. She would risk taking me to task in the pursuit of a greater good - helping Valerie.

#### *What happened to my questions - did they get answered?*

While both Marion's and Valerie's reports (May, 1994) offer descriptions and explanations of their enquiries, nevertheless I want to offer some indications as to how I think my questions helped them to progress. Mainly I will be trying to see if answers to some of my questions surfaced within either Marion's or Valerie's reports. Below I am now going to track the trajectory of my questions in Valerie's work to see what influence, if any, they had. I will use italicised sub-headings below consisting, in some cases, of relevant words or phrases from my questions to Marion or from ideas drawn from Marion's and Valerie's reports that seem to point to the relevance of my enquiry questions to Marion.

#### *Frustration*

In talking to Valerie, Marion heard the answer to my question about frustration: 'Why is Valerie frustrated?' As R.E. teacher, Valerie felt that she never got feedback on how she performed. She lamented the fact that, while she used to put a lot of time and energy into this area, her pupils saw her R.E. class *"as a time to relax and a time-out*

*from the academic classes."* She pinpointed some of her causes for concern as *"the way pupils behaved whenever a Bible or the word Jesus was introduced in the class."* Bible meant 'boring,' 'pointless,' 'irrelevant.' Although she doesn't detail the reflective processes she went through, Valerie finally offers a question that she feels will enable her to change and improve something:

*How can I, as a teacher of Religious Education, convince the pupils of the relevance of Religious Studies?*

### *'Evidence'*

While Valerie now had a question she could work with in her enquiry, she still needed to test, to seek 'evidence' in her practice about how she was 'performing', and what the 'reactions and opinions' (Marion's words) of the pupils were who were on the receiving end of what she was trying to do. As Marion said: this would *"show up (Valerie's) practice as well as the students' performance."* Valerie, therefore, decided to tape one of her classes of R.E. It would also produce some answers to the following cluster of questions I had posed to Marion for Valerie: *"What's its (R.E.'s) relevance to her students?"; "You also mention Valerie as feeling that many of her students regard Religion as a second-class subject. What's the evidence for this contention? Could she describe it in some detail?"* and *"In what ways are her students indifferent?"*

According to Marion, when Valerie audio-taped her class, she *"couldn't believe the noise level"* and she discovered that she talked more than she had thought she did, at times *"even interrupting the students' answers."* Then there were the letters she received back from her pupils, some of which were positive, such as, *"R.E. is important to me because it draws me closer to God."* Others were negative, though there were fewer than she expected, as follows: *"I think religion caused more hassle than it is worth."* Valerie's view now was *"that most only felt it (R.E.) was relevant when the topic was relevant to their lives, e.g., morality."*

### *Relevance - and balance*

Valerie was worried, though, about the efficacy of her subject, R.E. She asked plaintively in her report: *"Was anyone listening? Did R.E. have any relevance to the pupils lives at all or was my teaching all for nothing and had no value for the pupils?"* To maintain a balance, though, she spoke also about its advantages: *"Before you get the feeling that I felt the teaching of R.E. to be totally hopeless, I must say that is not the truth. I love teaching R.E."*

*'You don't have to explain the relevance of English'*

In contrasting English with R.E., Valerie felt she didn't need to 'explain' herself. The students saw it *"as relevant for their exams .... and some for the pleasure and love of the subject."*

*What criteria help you make sense of your data?*

My last question to Marion (26th November, 1993) was this: *"Did Valerie tell you what criteria she will use in deciding which Religion class to work with and why?"* Marion wondered how Valerie *"could narrow her focus."* She went on to say: *"I was convinced that as she gathered her 'evidence,' patterns would emerge and she could base her final report on these evolving patterns."* The main criterion Valerie decided for her enquiry was to choose class 5:33 to work with because they caused her most difficulty in the classroom. She had been teaching morality, particularly what she called *"life issues."* And as she said: *"Each day I would give a varied input on the topic and get feedback ...."* This 'evidence' enabled Valerie to make a judgment about what was happening. It was her way of applying her criteria.

### *Emergence of a solution*

With Marion's help, Valerie gradually moved forward from this position of frustration to doing the Myers-Briggs' Type Indicator Test with her students. According to this test, as explained by Keirsey & Bates (1984:3-4),

*you can look upon (the other) as a different person - someone you don't quite understand, but someone you can, with a sense of puzzlement perhaps, gradually come to appreciate .... But first it is necessary to study yourself.*

Valerie then moved on to Christology which is about giving "an account of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, of who he is and why he is important" (McGrath, 1996:80). She wondered how she could move from the "liveliness, immediacy and interpersonal nature" (these were the words I used in a telephone call to Marion, February, 1994) of looking at individual differences in the Myers-Briggs' test, to Christology "without losing (her students') interest," as Marion puts it. Marion thought it was "a master stroke" when Valerie decided to link both. She could help her class to enquire into the personality of Jesus using the Myers-Brigg's Test. By taping the class she could find out if their motivation and interest had arisen. Valerie's own reflections and evidence indicated that she had gradually moved from "being the centre of debate." She also found she was taking "a less vocal role" and was beginning to "gradually throw back the arguments of individual pupils to the rest of the class."

#### *Evaluation and criteria for 'success'*

At our fifth meeting (3.2.94) Marion, for example, in attempting to evaluate the outcomes of her and Valerie's actions, was able to tell me that Valerie now felt her class was "enjoying their classroom activities because of group work." Also, their "responses had improved," that is, they were less negative. Marion told me that Valerie now felt "more in control" because she had "developed a relationship with the class" and that she felt that "there was more honesty." Valerie's pupil, Rose, who had remarked that "Religion should be abolished," was in the process of writing about her concerns. She was, in effect, writing

about her changing perceptions of the role of religion in her life. Marion felt that this was a terrific achievement for Valerie. I thought so, too.

I find it interesting now to think that all my questions, in one way or another, were pursued by Marion and Valerie. The one question I asked, which seemed to me not to have been pursued earlier was the question to do with the relevance of R.E. for Valerie herself. I pursued that question myself with Valerie as Marion didn't wish to do so (see section 2 in this chapter). I now realise that my influence in enabling Valerie to move through her enquiry was indeed greatly helped by the questions I had offered to Marion initially, which were drawn from her own Me-Self Dialogue.

#### *Marion's formal evaluation of my support for her*

At my request, Marion agreed to do an evaluation of how I had helped her. She wrote (4th February, 1994): *"I was really afraid I wouldn't be any use in this new type of role (of tutoring Valerie)."* Regarding myself, she pointed out that *"you immediately answered, giving me encouragement and advice."* She added that this was *"a lifeline for me and helped me to decide how to work with Valerie in her enquiry."*

Regarding the nature of the help Marion felt I had given her, she said that I had

*the ability to ask very pertinent questions which help to focus on concerns and develop responses. Valerie said she was feeling frustrated by the seeming indifference of her students to R.E .... you immediately suggested that I ask Valerie what form her frustration took. And you asked if she could visualise or imagine how she would like her students to respond. Your questions really probed much deeper than mine.*

Marion also felt her tutoring had improved *"because you persuaded me to write."*



I was especially pleased that Marion felt my style of listening and encouragement helped because, as she said, *"you constantly nudged me on! I might be guilty of procrastination if I were allowed just to be."* She reminded me, though, that she suffered from a workload that was probably overload but that it was lessened by my helping her to organise herself better. She attributed this to my *"listening and by being encouraging,"* leading to her reflecting, which is *"a prerequisite for teaching!"*

I was very desirous of being as empathic as I could towards Marion, to profoundly respect her and her gifts. It was for those reasons that I used her Me-Self Dialogue in my design of questions for to use. And, of course, she herself noticed and appreciated my effort to be empathic, respectful and helpful, too, hence her reference above to my efforts to calm her fears by answering her, *"giving me encouragement and advice."* She also felt that my questions *"really probed much deeper than mine."* However much I might like hearing her say that, I felt deeply and profoundly, as I say below that:

*I go about the work of trying to remove fears by finding out the gifts and qualities the other has and then commenting on them positively. I do so not just because I believe it's the right thing to do. I do so because I feel very strongly that others are in constant need of appreciation, as I am myself.*

### Some final thoughts at this point

The process I went through was messy. It most certainly didn't move from A to B in a clear, linear progression. It stopped, started, omitted and then finally, included data I had forgotten about. Furthermore, I didn't initially understand how I could characterise how I was educatively supporting Marion. Ely *et al* (1997:37) helped me to understand that conundrum in an interesting and provocative way when they asked me: *"how do you come across as a person and as a researcher?"* This question didn't seem to have a primacy for Ely *et al*, but it is an essential question for me.

As Jack Whitehead read an earlier version of this chapter, he told me

he tried to keep my huge list of values in mind as he looked for evidence supporting these values in how I had worked with Marion. The following is the huge list of values Jack alluded to:

*I-You relationship, honesty, integrity, responsibility, self-acceptance and acceptance of others, affirmation, approval, toleration, valuing of others as being worthwhile; belief in a worthwhile meaning to life, a sense of belonging, openness to, and flexibility regarding, new ideas and beliefs, the cultivation of independence and freedom leading to mature interdependence, learning how to listen to my senses and the cultivation of a spirit of contemplation which embraces peace, quietness, happiness, joy, sanity, tranquillity, harmony!*

Naturally, Jack felt that it wasn't possible for him to keep them in mind as he looked for evidence of them in my account. I agreed that it was impossible for me to do so also. Here is what I wrote in my journal (10th February, '98) about how shocked I was at realising I still had so far to go as a researcher who understands his own practice: *"Bloody hell, I'm really disappointed! I'm certainly not thrilled to be stumbling around in the dark."* Perhaps I was holding values, but they were apparently divorced from my practice. I had assumed I'd be able to arrange my 'data' within the framework of the list of values I had articulated. But how was I now going to proceed? At this point Ely *et al* (1997) came to my rescue.

Ely *et al* (ibid) reminded me of the importance of 'bracketing' (p. 351), which I had first read about in Van Manen (1990:175). It is a technique that enables me to *"bracket preconceptions, prejudgments, beliefs and biases."* That doesn't mean that what I bracket is unimportant. No, it only means that I work on what is outside the brackets separately first. I distance myself from what is inside the brackets, temporarily, until I am satisfied that I have understood or represented what is outside the brackets to the best of my ability. What is inside the brackets are my values (those in my list above). In bracketing them I don't forget about them completely. No, it's just that I've now got a device for keeping them at a distance while I examine the textual data in front of me. Later I can synthesise both that which emerges from my examination of the data and that which is within the brackets.

My reading of Eisner and Jackson (in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990:90; 161-163) also helped me to look at my data in another way. It was a way that, I believe, allowed my values to emerge. I could look directly at my 'data' without <sup>attempting</sup> initially <sup>to</sup> place any 'burden' of criteria/values on them. I could allow my data to speak directly to me. I wouldn't, of course, hear or see what the data were saying unless I was receptive, open to being 'surprised'.

I went back to my original data, to my letters, to Marion's letters, to our taped conversations, to the reports Marion and Valerie made. What did I discover? I was astonished to discover that the questions which I prepared for Marion as her way of tutoring Valerie were in fact based on her own Me-Self imaginary Dialogue. I had forgotten that I had initially done that! I felt a need to write something in my journal about my discovery (20th February, '98):

*I am simultaneously thrilled at my discovery and doubtful about its importance. Why am I always like that, simultaneously rejoicing and doubtful about my right to rejoice? Why can't I just go with the flow of my creativity?*

I have reflected and internally debated within myself about how I want to describe and explain the phrase, 'educative influence' in my question/title for this chapter. I am determined that my 'influence' doesn't need to be derived from, or based on, a set of predetermined skills, or categories - even values - external to my practice, that I use to explain it. I don't want to trawl through books and magazine articles searching for 'mentoring skills', 'tutoring skills' or critical friendship skills, to use as criteria or categories to describe and explain what I mean by how I have educatively influenced Marion. I don't mean by that statement to imply disdain for these 'skills' and categories or for their description and explanation in various books. In fact, I respect the authors of these books. I know that writers and their works can illuminate my account but my account can't ever be reduced to an analysis of writers' works. My greater need is to be independent, to be autonomous in how I describe and explain how I have educatively influenced Marion as an educator in this study of

singularity. Nevertheless, I do want, in my final thoughts about how I describe and explain my educative relationship with Marion, to cite one writer, Collins (1992: 140) and to intertwine what he says with the way I feel I conducted my educative relationship with Marion. Then at the end of this section I will, unequivocally, offer my own view of what I bring to an educative relationship.

In my educative relationship with Marion I tried to work with her so that she would sense my approval, my sense of reverence for her. I wanted her to feel affirmed at a deep level of her personality. And, according to Collins (1992: 140), affirmation is perhaps the most important dynamic of love. Affirmation comes from a Latin word meaning "*to make strong*." In affirming, I was attempting to approve and make stronger Marion's inner value in order to help release her hidden potential. My love, my care for Marion was primarily a way of relating to her. It was only secondarily a way of being available to serve her in some way. My service to her and to others, too, is an expression of my intimate relationship with them. That is what I believe I was attempting to do in my educative relationship with Marion, affirming her, making her 'strong', so that she would be able to improve what she was doing in her classroom with her pupils. It was also my gift to her for her own personal growth and development.

Collins (ibid, p. 154) further helps me when he says that I may express my love as compassionate intimacy in three inter-related ways. As I am moving through Collins's explanation, I am seeing how what he is saying is like what happened in my educative relationship with Marion. First, there was my *fellow feeling* with Marion. It existed because I perceived that some of my experiences of my youth were similar to hers, for example, her perception that she had been "voiceless" when she left school. This voicelessness had, however, given her a determination that when she became a teacher she would help her students to "*be able to give their opinions and state how they felt*." I, too, felt voiceless when I was young and even now when older (chapter 5). My concern for helping the voiceless to regain their voices didn't, however, consciously happen during the time I was a primary teacher, 1961 to 1971. It was only when I subsequently

became a secondary teacher, guidance counsellor, head of a secondary school, and now a teacher educator, that I became progressively determined to help the "voiceless" to recover their voices. That determination is now enshrined in my fellow feeling with others who are in some way deprived. It is enshrined also, I feel, in my practice.

In my educative relationship with Marion there was also what Collins (ibid, p. 154) calls *wounded wonder*. The 'wonder' part of this phrase required a leap of my imagination where I went beyond appearances in order to recognise with approval Marion's unique value as a person. Of course, I can't 'prove' in any empirical way that this happened. I know it interiorly, however. I felt a heart-felt sense of wonder in the presence of Marion. It was perhaps akin to being ecstatic, the kind of feeling that comes with really getting to know another. It was like 'standing outside' myself, somehow being myself but in a self-forgetful way. I believe my practise of self-forgetfulness with Marion often happened, at least momentarily, when I was reading her letters to me, when I was reflecting on her Me-Self Dialogue, and when I met her. It also happened when I discussed with her, over many hours, her desire to become a published novelist. My enthusiasm eventually won out over her reluctance. She has since written three novels published under her real name.

But what does the 'wounded' in the phrase, *wounded wonder*, stand for? It stands for how wounded spiritually, emotionally or physically people may be. Marion's woundedness was never, however, my primary focus of attention. Rather, what was always uppermost in mind, I feel, was my certainty about her inalienable value. And whatever was causing her to contradict in practice the values she said she held, was the woundedness I detected. It was then that Collins third compassion, *indignant compassion* (ibid, p. 154) came into play for me. I recognised Marion's innermost value which was in some way, I felt, being denied. She was contradicting her values in her practice and I wished to be able to help her to resist anything that militated against this negation of her values. I wanted to work with her to negate the negation, so that she could become self-

actualised and improve what she was doing.

As well as explaining love as approval, affirmation, reverence and compassion, I also want to explain it as empathy. Empathy means that I progressively imagine myself in the place of Marion. It means offering a quality of care and commitment that involves both feeling and action. It involves me working at being open which requires mutual trust. It means understanding that I can't be authentic unless I am honest and humble.

So my educative relationship with Marion showed, I believe, that it was a caring one. It was a caring that is my form of commitment, a commitment that embraces the human quality of relationships, that embraces others. I embrace others because they are human and I am human. My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible. I go about the work of trying to remove fears by finding out the gifts and qualities the other has and then commenting on them positively. I do so not just because I believe it's the right thing to do. I do so because I feel very strongly that others are in constant need of appreciation, as I am myself. I also believe that I can never exaggerate the gifts and talents of others. Without doubt, of course, some have greater gifts and talents than others. I take that for granted. But I'm not interested in comparison. When I am with a person, I believe I mostly see only that person. The question of comparing their gifts and talents with those of somebody else doesn't arise. If it did, it would mean that my attention had wavered, had wandered from the person I am with. I believe my lack of interest in making comparisons enables me to concentrate on the uniqueness and individuality of others. It is also why I am wary of the concept of 'community' (chapter 6) unless it finds a way of enabling others to become who they are meant to become. Because of my efforts to practise approval, affirmation, reverence, compassion and empathy towards Marion, I believe I have answered Ely's (1997:37) question to the best of my ability: *"how do you come across as a person and as a researcher?"*

## Section Two

### Influencing Valerie and her pupils and being influenced by them

Summary 2 Valerie wanted to use her practice to show the relevance of R.E. to her pupils and I felt it would be helpful to her to reveal in a taped conversation with me what her own religious beliefs were. To help allay whatever fears she feels and to help establish a rapport which doesn't yet exist, I offer in a letter to her some thoughts about my own spiritual journey. It comprises some imaginary dialogues between me and Tom Merton but also questions for Valerie to answer. I take various opportunities too to commend her on the work she is doing with her pupils.

I persuade Valerie to encourage her pupils to write about their own concerns. She does so by encouraging them to become free to think for themselves. And that despite the fact that she may have felt at times like those teachers Ruddock (1996) writes about who are: *"nervous about inviting evaluative comments from pupils."*

In reading Valerie's account about what Rose in particular has to say about her desire for freedom, I realise that my understanding of my own freedom has become enlarged. In considering Zoe Parker's criticism of where I placed Rose - Valerie's pupil - in my text, I go on the defensive. It takes four further years (1995 to 1999) for me to admit that I silenced Zoe's voice and that in doing so I exercised 'power relations'. I renew my commitment to *"interrupting existing power relations"* in the future whenever necessary.

I come to understand, too, that what Valerie and her pupils are doing is illuminating in a living way what the SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1996) Document is prescribing, especially the *"quest for meaning in life"* and *"the sense of identity and self-worth."* Both of these ideas together with freedom and love are essential to me in my efforts to describe and explain my educational development as I come to know my spirituality.

Just as she encouraged her pupil, Rose, to learn her own meaning for freedom, so Valerie's decision not to reply to my correspondence enables me to see another aspect of freedom. It is a paradoxical freedom, one to do with boundaries. They demarcate for Valerie that she is different to me.



*I attempt to establish a climate as free from fear as possible*

When I met Valerie (20th January, 1994), I suggested to her that she tape a conversation with me about her religious beliefs and values. She told me that she *"would be nervous about doing this on tape."* Yes, I agreed it would be an ordeal. However, I wrote to her a few days later (25th January, 1994) in an effort to allay whatever fears, including anxiety, she might have had. In doing so I think I sincerely wanted to see in what way I could establish a rapport which, I felt, didn't yet exist. I was very unsure as to what was the best way to do it but felt that perhaps offering her some of my own journal entries about my own spiritual journey could help.

In the following extract from my letter I offer some of my own thoughts about my own spirituality. I emphasise the tentative nature of what I am sending her: *"It makes an effort at articulating my desire for some form of spirituality."* I don't hide my contradictions either: *"It is full of contradictions on my part - not on the part of Tom"* (Thomas Merton was a monk and spiritual writer who died in 1968). I am including the idea of contradiction for two reasons. Firstly, I want to emphasise that I am engaged in coming to know my own spirituality with no clear signposts, no clear answers. Secondly, I want to tell Valerie about Whitehead's (1993:56) idea about the importance of *"living contradiction."* So I say:

*I hold certain values and yet the way I live contradicts these values. The important thing is to be able to share my values, such as they are, with others and then to examine the way I try to live them in my life and work - again with others. That is a part of what action research is about.*

While I am wanting to enable Valerie to understand me and so perhaps have an opportunity to 'change' in some way, I am also opening myself to the possibility for change for myself. It isn't only how she is going to receive what I am sending her that is important, it is also about what I am going to learn in the process and in the aftermath. I am taking on the role of being vulnerable to the fear I am attributing to Valerie; fear of her reaction to me and my writing. Just as asking her to talk about her religious beliefs and values will

inevitably, I feel, evoke fears within her, so too I am submitting myself to these self-same fears by revealing my emerging religious beliefs and values in the information I am sending Valerie.

Because I had heard Valerie more than once in our few brief meetings emphasising how important R.E. and belief in God were to her, I felt it might be important for her to be able to articulate what those beliefs were. Afterwards, I felt, she could use them as her standards of judgment by which she could judge her actions and her report. I added that I felt an extract from my journal about my spirituality (which emphasised my uncertainty about why I was doing the work I was doing) might be helpful. With that extract I would also include my imaginary dialogue with Tom Merton about my own growth and development. These two extracts plus my set of religious questions might help Valerie in her taped conversation to focus on her religious beliefs and values when we met on 4th February, 1994. I said in my letter to Valerie that my extracts, *"may help you and me to understand a part of the 'why' of your concern with your R.E. classes."*

#### Questions to enable Valerie to talk about her religious beliefs

I now want to offer my reader the list of questions I gave Valerie and my reasoning behind them. The first thing to notice is that the 'God' I am referring to is a male God. I refer to him using the masculine pronouns, "He," "His" or "Him." I do that deliberately knowing from my few brief conversations with Valerie that that is how she too refers to God. However, I was also convinced from these brief conversations with her that her God was "living" for her and that she felt that this belief was her strongest motivating factor in her teaching of R.E. I felt that my questions might enable her to say what the quality and meaning of that belief was.

##### *1. What is the relevance of R.E. for you?*

That is the same question I asked Marion to raise with Valerie. Because Marion didn't then feel able to do so, I was now putting it to

Valerie myself. Because I have often felt that people belonging to religious denominations hesitate to speak about God, I felt I too should respect that hesitation by at least not asking it as a first direct question. I would begin with a question to Valerie that I felt was broader: *"What is the relevance of R.E. for you?"* I felt there would be more scope within it for her to think not only about her belief in God but also about how she wished to live out that particular value in her classroom teaching with her pupils.

*2. If we say God exists what does His existence mean to us?*

I decided to address the subsequent questions to 'us' and 'we', rather than to Valerie directly as 'you'. Why did I do that? I felt it would make it easier for Valerie to answer 'we' questions rather than direct 'you' or 'I' questions. I wanted to be sensitive to her sensibilities. Clarification would perhaps initially be conceptual but, having achieved clarification, Valerie might like to track what became of her concepts about the 'existence of God' when she was doing her action enquiry with her R.E. classes.

*3. What is our image of God?*

Whatever Valerie might say about this particular question, it is one that caused me some personal anxiety for a long time. I was hesitant about admitting that I didn't in fact have an image of God. It seemed to me to be a sine qua non of religious belief to have an image of God. For me, though, God was and is a "presence," even if not as "definable" as are the physical presences of others to me.

*4. Is He (God) just private to us? Or do we make Him public?  
How?*

*5. How is He a part of our life and relationship with others? What does that look like?*

*6. Is it easy for us to make our relationship with him public?  
Why? Why not?*

*7. Is belief in him and a relationship with Him part of a form of life that we live? What form of life do we live that shows this belief and relationship? How do we show that in our practice?*

I feel that I, who believe in the existence of God, have often felt

deprived by the lack of openness of others about the God they say they believe in. I believe my revelation of my beliefs as well as others' revelation and sharing of their beliefs in a personal God would enable believers in God to come to decisions about how we might show that belief in our relationships with others.

8. *Can we speak to Him in an intimate way, the way we sometimes speak to others? How?*
9. *Is belief in Him a value like justice, democracy, integrity, etc.?*

My belief in God is for me about the distinction between what is and what is not yet. It implies a notion of transcendence but also, more mundanely, about how I presently practice relationship and how it might become better in the future. For me then, intimacy with God is both an experience of and a preparation for relationship that can always become better. And humour is helpful too! A recent (February, 1998) birthday greeting card from a friend pointed this up for me:

*I was in this card store, undecided as to what message you'd appreciate most on your birthday card, when this born again guy offered his assistance by quoting from the scriptures.*

*So I shot him.*

*Happy birthday!*

I laughed loud and long at this birthday greeting. I found it utterly delicious, funny and unpretentious. This is partially what I want my belief in God to be like!

10. *Would trying to define Him or our relationship with Him destroy something intimate and private? Why? Why not?*

Adding this question for Valerie's perusal was my way of saying: "look, if you don't want to, you needn't answer any of these questions. Feel free to do so or not to do so." Tactically, though, I put it at the end. I felt that reading through the earlier questions might perhaps cause Valerie to eventually feel that: "Talking about God isn't really all that threatening. I feel okay about it. I am, after all, able to say something about God and my relationship with Him that may be useful to others and that won't embarrass me." That was my wish!

A very useful outcome of these questions was that they permitted me to offer a view of them myself and helped to prepare me to show my living engagement with John and God in chapter 3.

### My imaginary dialogue with Tom Merton

I sent some excerpts (my journal, 13th December, 1993) from my imaginary dialogues with Tom Merton to Valerie. One of the excerpts I sent dealt with the 'true' and 'false' self, an idea that was beginning to have great meaning for me. I felt that it was in being in creative solitude and in relationship with others and making the fruits of these relationships public that I would learn how I was in fact ridding myself of the "*false illusions*" and "*false self*" I talk about below:

Tom     *I said to Jacques Maritain: "... you are going on your way to God and perhaps I am too, though I suppose my eagerness to go is partly wishful thinking. For there is yet work to be done in my own life. There are great illusions to be got rid of, and there is a false self that has to be taken off, if it can. There is still much to change before I can be living in the truth .... and in humility and without any self-concern" (Letter, June 11, 1963). What do you think?*

Ben     *I am in a state of great ambiguity. One part of me wishes to go to God, another part of me holds back ....*

The following segment of this imaginary dialogue deals with the need for delight and joy in myself. And while I talk about giving up "*those bits of myself that are obnoxious*," that action isn't so much what is necessary as the acceptance of myself and of love from others. And, paradoxically, it is in loving myself and opening myself up to others that I will rid myself of my 'obnoxious bits.' Our conversation is below:

Tom     *Do you believe that "The mere fact of my manness should be an everlasting joy and delight ...."? (Merton's journal, August, 1965)?*

Ben     *.... I like that thought. Perhaps I'll have to give more*

*attention to being delighted with myself. And there is a paradox here. I have to empty myself, detach myself. Does that mean giving up the bits I delight in? On second thoughts I don't think so. Maybe I have to move towards giving up those bits of myself that are obnoxious so that I can love myself more and so open myself up to accepting love from God and from others*  
....

### Further communication with Valerie

Because I was still worried, still "legitimately anxious" that Valerie be "as free from fears as is humanly possible," I wrote to her again on 31st January, 1994, to thank her for meeting me "on Friday last, and I apologise for being late." I felt it would help if I stressed the tremendously exacting action research work she had done to date:

*I must say I am impressed by the colossal amount of extra work you took on - letters to three classes and their analysis, etc. You certainly are thorough. I sincerely hope you are not overwhelmed - anyway, Marlon is a great help to you here!*

I spent some time reassuring Valerie. I ask her, for example, how I listened. I also felt that commending what Valerie intended doing was crucially important. As I said previously: "I very strongly feel that others are in constant need of appreciation, as I am myself." So I said that: "I like your idea of trying to break down the barriers between the Bible, Christology, etc., etc ...." I was wondering also if, as well as emphasising the areas of the R.E. curriculum that she intended teaching, Valerie might also wonder about how to teach her pupils to think 'religiously.' I intended that to mean as a person might teach mathematically or scientifically, and so on. I felt there was possibly a mind-set involved in being able to think mathematically and scientifically. I said:

*I feel it is learning to think mathematically, scientifically, etc. that is important not mathematics and science. If this is true, is RE really a process and not a product and is it about thinking Christologically (if that is the right word!)? And isn't that something akin to "putting on that mind which is in Christ Jesus" - and that is a hard trick to achieve, isn't it?*

I was anxious to encourage Valerie to get away from her perhaps taken-for-granted educational meanings; to shake up a little bit at least her normal ways of understanding what she taught and why she taught what she taught. It might become part of the freedom that I wished for Valerie, a freedom that in my experience schools are not always as careful about as they might be. There was also the question for me of persuading Valerie to allow her pupils to reflect freely on their own statements, their own arguments about the topics they were discussing in their classrooms. I therefore asked Valerie to consider allowing her pupils to do their own enquiries. Here is how I put it:

*I think we also mentioned something about challenging statements made by the pupils! Get them, maybe, to do action (enquiries) on their own questions/statements .... Maybe they and you would find this a stimulating and intellectual challenge.*

In the next section of my letter I think I was trying to let Valerie know that her own questions may be far more important than mine when I said:

*I would have to say these questions arise out of my own experience/reflections! I realise they may have no relevance to your situation, your beliefs, your values!*

I also decided it was necessary for me to tell both Valerie and Marion that I was studying for a doctorate and to that end, of course, our conversations would be useful to me. But they had a right to refuse to be involved. Anyway here's what I said:

*I do really want to respect your autonomy and your integrity. I do not want to rage around like a bull in a china shop and overstep boundaries. I must also mention that this is a key interest area for me personally and it is also important for my studies (Marion might have told you that I am studying for a Ph.D. degree).*

### Communicating with Valerie about her religious beliefs

In my reflections below about the 'difficulty' felt afterwards by Valerie

because of my audio-tape of her religious beliefs, I am using what Lomax (1999: 14) refers to as the inner voice, or "*an intra-subjective dialectic*." It is a device I use by which I can represent my meanings to myself. The other part of this dialectic is the interpersonal, or what Lomax calls "*an inter-subjective dialectic*" by which I represent my meanings to others. My journey of self-discovery involves these two forms of dialogue. But now to Valerie and my conversation with her and my explanation of what happened afterwards.

I met Valerie on 4th February, 1994, to dialogue with her about her religious beliefs and about the relevance of R.E. Afterwards she told Marion that she was 'in bits' after her conversation with me. Were there overtones there of being treated as subject to object? That in reality we were having what Buber would term an I-It conversation where there was really no meeting of minds or hearts? Perhaps I am being too sensitive about my part in it, however. Maybe inevitably, conversations around our most deeply held values are traumatic. Valerie didn't after all complain about having a conversation about her religious beliefs with me. She might have been 'in bits', as she said, nonetheless she also admitted to finding me genuine:

*.... having got to know you better, I wouldn't now find it (the conversation) so threatening or as imposing. Having got to know you, I find you a very genuine person in search of answers like myself.*

I am musing now that Valerie may have found it threatening for herself to talk about her religious beliefs to anyone else. She did use the word, 'imposing', though. Was she implying by that that I was imposing on her? She didn't say so then or at any other time. I am now inclined to think she perhaps meant something else by it. Normally, 'imposing' means to demand compliance with, to demand something of. There is nothing in my correspondence or journal extracts that imply that. In fact anything I had to say was tentative, was inviting. It was inviting a negative response no less than a positive one. Perhaps Valerie meant she was being self-referential in her use of the word, 'imposition'! By agreeing to talk to me about something that she felt was perhaps private, she was imposing a



burden on herself that in hindsight she felt she wouldn't now do? That is, I think, a possibility. On balance, though, I don't think that was the case. No, I feel that she felt she was perhaps involved in a risk that was 'scary', that delved into her feelings more than she at first realised. And yet, I now have to consider also that Valerie didn't perhaps know me well enough to confide in me at this level of revealing her religious beliefs to me. When I said earlier that I wanted to be sensitive to Valerie's sensibilities when I posed my question 2 to her, which reads as follows: *"If we say God exists what does His existence mean to us?"* I said it might help her *"to track what became of her concepts about the 'existence of God' when she was doing her action enquiry with her R.E. classes."* With the value of hindsight, I now feel compelled to say that knowing about God and His existence and tracking its possible influence in my practice is my agenda, not Valerie's. I may have projected my own needs in this respect on to Valerie. To that extent, I feel, I have been a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993:70). When speaking of my desire to care for others, I may not have sufficiently shown that care towards Valerie's sensibilities.

I subscribe to Ferder's (1988: 107) notion of care, and fear I may have negated it in connection with Valerie, I need to outline it here and renew my commitment to it. Ferder (ibid) says that having care for others means having the kind of respect for them that calls forth some kind of response. Caring for the other implies feeling too. As Ferder says: *"It is always personal."* When I care for someone it suggests that that I have a particular way of seeing the other, an inner attitude that is basically for the other. My fundamental respect for the other means I suspend judgment. That I am open to the other's self-revelation. That I avoid being manipulative. That my behaviour is based not on my own needs but on my keen awareness of the other's needs. I feel that it is this kind of care, this kind of love that sets others and me free (Powell, 1989: 73-76). So love and freedom are intimately related, love is liberation. It breaks my preoccupation with myself.

I have chosen to include in this chapter only some very few sections

of Valerie's conversation about her religious beliefs, mainly those which she herself revealed to Marion. I am doing so out of deference to her sensitivity about her feeling in 'bits' originally, though she never asked me not to use any of this conversation in my writing. The fact is that Valerie did wish to talk to some extent about her religious beliefs. Below is what I hear her saying in the following extract from Marion's account:

*Religion is a lifestyle .... a way of seeing life. It is a search for a depth, a dimension to life beyond the routine and mundane. It is an acknowledgement that everything has meaning, no matter how bad it seems. It is a relationship without which I would become nothing.*

At different times in her ongoing conversations with Marion, Valerie offered eloquent testimony to her values. They weren't just pious reflections or aspirations. Her practice in fact showed her living out her values which, as she said, enabled her to "see each child as different." Here below is a little of what she said:

*In September my values would be something as follows: to see God in every child .... justice and equality for all .... Action Research has helped me to refocus on values so that I can see each child as different and, just because different to me, is not against me.*

In using her personal 'I', Valerie was able, I believe, to explain what she meant as she attempted to explain her own educational development. Her report was her explanation of her living out of her values as she showed them ostensibly in her actions with her pupils.

#### How I construe my role in Valerie's enquiry

Somewhat like my role with Marion, my role with Valerie wasn't high profile except at the beginning. However, I also realise now that I have affected and influenced Valerie. Through Marion's and my questions, Valerie was able to gradually move forward from 'frustration' to change. I believe her examination of her religious

values also enabled change to happen. In any case, many of her pupils endorsed the change that had taken place in her practice. For example, Susan said: *"This year the class is open and free discussion is allowed and encouraged whilst still being taught the Catholic beliefs."*

Perhaps the 'freedom' I offered Valerie in being able, for the first time, for both of us to discuss our religious beliefs and values, may have played a part in that! Mary, another pupil, was also very sure about the change and improvement she had seen in her R.E. classes: *"So far this year I love religion class and cannot wait for it. I am going in with a positive attitude and I think this is the key to religion in Ireland ...."*

I was available to Marion and to Valerie whenever they needed my help. One way was helping initially with questions. Another was the conversation I had with Valerie on her religious beliefs when Marion declined, for her own reasons, to do so. Another way in which I helped was through writing letters of encouragement to both of them. There were phone calls. I offered help in the framing and writing of Marion's and Valerie's action research reports over many visits to their school and their visits to me at the college of education where I worked. My influence with Valerie was more at a distance than the relationship I had with Marion, but substantial for all that.

I believe the best way for me to try and track our reciprocal influence on each other is to consider again the original questions I put to Valerie in a letter. She was the recipient of Marion's questions which were devised by me but based on Marion's Me-Self Dialogue. She also received my 'religious' questions. We had a taped conversation around these values.

### Dealing with the questions

1. *What is the relevance of R.E. for you?*
2. *If we say God exists what does His existence mean to us?*
4. *Is He (God) just private to us? Or do we make Him public? How?*
6. *Is it easy for us to make our relationship with him public? Why? Why not?*

When Valerie and I met and audio-taped our conversation about her religious beliefs, the questions above found their way into our dialogue. However, I don't wish to reveal all Valerie's answer to these questions. She hasn't said her answers shouldn't be revealed. But because they are hers, I believe, the vast bulk of them should only be revealed by her. That is her prerogative. I will, however, make use of what she has already revealed from that audio-tape to reveal an incident which I believe is connected directly with her practice of her values in her R.E. classrooms. I have already said that I was wondering if Valerie would perhaps detect a discrepancy between what she now 'knew', what she now believed, after considering and reflecting on the relevance of R.E., and how she was teaching R.E. If she detected the discrepancy she would have a 'reason' for wanting to change something. My answer is to invite the reader to listen to at least one of these 'discrepancies' which Valerie places at the beginning of her own report.

Valerie gives a pen picture of a day in her classroom when she stands at the blackboard on which she has drawn two columns. In one she has written the values of Jesus as outlined in the Beatitudes; in the second, she has written the values people hold today. She and her pupils discuss these values until, as she says, *"it became obvious to me, like it had last year, that the pupils' values and my values (based on the Beatitudes) were worlds apart."* She went on to say:

*What I had to say seemed to make no sense to the pupils. I felt like John the Baptist - 'a voice crying in the wilderness'. Was anyone listening? Did Religious Education have any relevance to the pupils lives at all or was my teaching all for nothing and had no value for the pupils?*

It seemed to me that this picture contrasted sharply with what she said she herself believed. In her conversation with me on 4th February, 1994, she had instanced some of the moral meaning of her religious beliefs when she and her husband intended changing house a few years before that. She said:

*Every day I went into class and opened up the text book, it*

*opened at the same page: 'Blessed are the poor.' I said to my husband, if we get caught up in this new mortgage we'll be showing that we have no time for the poor, d'you know what I mean? If I do that I am not living what I'm teaching. Then I'd really have major qualms of conscience, so much so, that we didn't move house, d'you know what I mean?*

For me, there was a direct connection between what Valerie was thinking in her classroom about the Beatitudes, one of which is about being "*poor in spirit*" and this part of her February conversation with me. It seems to me that this was at least one explanation for what God's existence meant to her. He and His message weren't just written in tracts, however inspirational. They were to be lived as Valerie showed. Her concern, I supposed, was how to live it in her teaching.

#### Valerie's response to another question

7. *Is belief in him (God) and a relationship with Him part of a form of life that we live? What form of life do we live that shows this belief and relationship? How do we show that in our practice?*

While Valerie didn't represent her relationship directly with God in terms of what she did in the classroom, nevertheless she showed her sensitivity, born of her religious beliefs. In her report (in my data archive) she shows how she spent considerable time, for example, trying to "*understand where she (Sandra, a pupil) was coming from and what in me sparked such resentment.*" Valerie "*felt a little extra-curricular contact might overcome this.*" She got Sandra to help with the 'Rock Nativity' her class was producing. Valerie said that she left Sandra "*to decide herself the best way to go about it.*" Sandra's final letter to Valerie opened with "*Hi again*" and later, regarding R.E. in the class, she said to Valerie: "*Some of the discussions made me feel differently about things.*" With Sandra, Valerie was entering into a sensitive educative relationship with a pupil who, not long before, was very difficult to 'manage'. Through Valerie's courage and ingenuity, she helped to resolve the inter relational difficulty between herself and Sandra. Sandra, of course, had to trust Valerie for

something to change, and she did so. I too, had to trust that my educative relationship with Valerie would survive whatever awkwardness or difficulties I may have unwittingly caused her when I asked her to converse about her religious beliefs. And that some of my beliefs, some of my faith, wasn't totally alien and different from her own. That we, therefore, had something in common.

### Rose's essay

Regarding Rose, another of Valerie's pupils, I had asked Valerie to allow Rose to do her own action enquiry. An action enquiry didn't take place, but Valerie did encourage Rose to write about her concerns. I believe, therefore, that I exercised some influence on Rose's learning. Rose is important to my enquiry and so I now want to indicate my research intentions in her regard. In April 1994, Jack had a query for me about Rose: *"I'd check to see what Rose produced in her action enquiry to see what this case study might tell us about the spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of the pupils."* In considering Jack's concern, I am confining my response to Rose's and my spiritual development. I will refer to whatever links there may be between our spiritual and moral development, and the 'quality' of our individual learning.

I want to track the influence on Rose and on me of the SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority) Document, *Education for adult life: the spiritual and moral development of young people* (a summary report, 1996). Two specifications of this report's definition of spirituality (p. 6) struck a chord with me. They are:

- \* *the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values;*
- \* *the sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others.*

Under its sub-heading, *The importance of spiritual development* (p. 6), the SCAA Document also says, inter alia, that:

*Spirituality can be seen as the source of the will to act morally.  
Some delegates suggested that spirituality, being individual and*

*dynamic, can sometimes conflict with traditional assumptions about morality. Spirituality encompasses an intellectual urge to discovery which may lead to challenging received views.*

This section of the document reminds me of the importance for me of emancipation, freedom and liberation. When I am asked about the 'quality' of my , and others', learning there is always one piece of 'evidence' I look for: is there evidence of independence, of freedom? Is there evidence of the search for truth in exploring and developing one's spirituality as the SCAA document puts it when it says that:

*Some delegates regarded all learning as a spiritual activity .... The human spirit engaged in a search for truth could be a definition of education, challenging young people to explore and develop their own spirituality and helping them in their own search for truth (p. 6).*

I realise, of course, that quotations from the SCAA document are not unanimously agreed with and are opinions distilled from only 'some delegates' who debated these issues at a conference on the subject matter of the SCAA document held in January 1996. However, I will attempt to integrate those elements that I quoted from the SCAA document, as I endeavour to interpret them in the light of the data offered in Valerie's and Rose's accounts and as I understood and interpreted them in the light of my influence on Rose and her influence on me.

### *Reflecting on Rose's views about freedom*

I read in Valerie's report the voice of Rose saying: "*in R.E. class there is no accommodation of different views, especially on moral issues.*" I felt that unless she had the opportunity to argue her views publicly, she was unlikely to wish to take up the 'official' position Valerie as teacher wished her to take, a position endorsed as I knew by the kind of mission and ethos statements Catholic Schools profess. Like many young people I knew in my thirty years in the classroom, Rose needed, I felt, to flex her intellectual muscles and she needed the requisite freedom to do so.

I heartily agree with Rose when she says:

*there should be room for all views as all people are unique and individual. I think the emphasis should be on personal development rather than moral (development/beliefs) because a developed person is better able to side with something which they have chosen rather than what has been enforced on them.*

Somehow it doesn't surprise me to read that Rose feels she needs 'personal development' in order to make choices. Perhaps moral development is, for her, something to do with the enforcement of the arguments of one 'side', of conformity with one side, whereas she needs the opportunity to choose between alternatives.

Like Rose, I sometimes have difficulty in reconciling my view that I am unique, with a view of community or society that may say that there are codes of conduct that "*govern us all.*" How do I reconcile the different, if not unique me, with the many, that is, community, or society? For me, human relationship is not about an oppositional stance, but a dialectical relationship between these two positions. As an individual person in society I have rights. I also have duties and responsibilities to others, including myself. In this equation it seems to me that the last bit is often left out. I believe that a community or society is only healthy to the extent that there is frequent tension around the dialectical relationship between me as an individual and me as a member of community, or society. If 'rights' are rampant, then perhaps individualism is ignoring the needs of individuals to both be accepted and acceptable as members of communities and of society. If 'duties' and 'responsibilities' are rampant, then perhaps a necessary individuality may be snuffed out. That is why I welcome Rose's tension around her concerns and the seriousness with which Valerie deals with it. Perhaps Rose will eventually be able to achieve a necessary balance between herself as an individual and the community/society of which she is a member.

I am learning anew from Rose the importance to her, and now to me too, of the need for a 'personal development' which welcomes, even embraces the concept of freedom of choice. The 'basic freedom,' according to Berlin (Gray, 1995:15), is the capacity for choice itself, a



choice among alternatives. I am not sure to what degree I would be fully human if I didn't have this capacity. It is why I feel so empathic towards the felt view expressed by Rose that: *"there should be room for all views ...."* Her plea that there should be this room is, I feel, not only a plea that other opinions be considered, but particularly I think, a plea for herself of her own basic freedom. I think she might appreciate this statement of Berlin's (1969: vi), that:

*The fundamental sense of freedom is freedom from chains, from imprisonment, from enslavement by others.*

In encouraging Rose to write about her concerns, it seems to me that Valerie freed her from negativity about R.E. as Rose admits below. Though it may sound a little melodramatic to say so, it may be true that Valerie also freed Rose from the chains of *"enslavement by others"* by inviting her freely to think about and choose her 'beliefs.'

As a teacher in a religious-run school, Valerie worked, of course, to uphold the ethos of the school, and had every 'right' to do so. As a result, however, of reading the many data-letters she got from her various classes, she came to the conclusion that she wanted to be *"a facilitator in faith development, not an enforcer."* To me, that did not indicate that she wished to abandon the search to find a way of getting Rose and others to respect what the school stood for in moral or religious matters or that she wouldn't want Rose and others to practise the school's particular religious ethical code. She felt she had a strict duty, as Marion said to me at one of our meetings, *"To transmit the Catholic tradition. That is an onerous duty."* At the same time, Valerie had come to the conclusion that she had to facilitate freedom of debate about the 'faith' she wished her pupils to practise. Unless it were eventually freely chosen it would not perhaps be of very great consequence to Rose's life anyway. At the end of chapter 3 I talk about a similar freedom, about my belief in a God of my understanding.

I can understand why Nick Tate (SCAA's Chief Executive in the SCAA Document, 1996: 10) would criticise the belief that *"morality is merely a matter of taste, concluding that 'if ever a dragon needed slaying, it is*

*the dragon of relativism."* It isn't that many people wouldn't be critical of relativism. They would, I believe. But for me the question really is: *"how do I help to bring young people to a position of responsibility without forcing them to be responsible?"* I think Valerie's action enquiry showed how the process of open enquiry, with respect for the views of others, can be initiated and pursued with young people. Valerie may be hoping also that young people, when given responsibility for thinking out their views, may not so easily give up their traditions, which obviously include notions of 'right' and 'wrong', thus supporting Tate's abhorrence of *"morality (as) merely a matter of taste."*

### *My concern for freedom*

When I originally asked Valerie to consider allowing Rose to do her own action enquiry, I was strongly motivated by a concern for freedom. It was, and is, a freedom that is based on tolerance for others, based on affirming, and granting approval to others, based on valuing others as worthwhile. These are the values which I hope I too am showing to others both in practice and in my representation of that practice in this chapter and within my thesis as a whole. But, of course, my expression of my concern about the value of freedom will remain an unrealised concern unless I do something practically about it. Asking Valerie to allow one of her pupils, Rose, to do her own action enquiry, which in reality became an essay, was one way in which I could live out my concern about freedom. Asking Valerie to talk about her religious values was another. But now, let me flesh out a bit more the meaning freedom holds for me.

Hannah Arendt (1961: 4) describes the kind of freedom I want, a freedom that it seems to me Rose too is seeking. Arendt enthralls me when she talks of Rene Char's Resistance story, where at the end of the story he says of himself and his men, *"At every meal that we eat together, freedom is invited to sit down. The chair remains vacant, but the place is set."* It seems to me that is what Rose sought; it is what I seek, to sit down with others and with 'freedom.' The empty chair is a symbol of the 'public space' created between Rose, the class, Valerie

and me, where 'freedom could appear' (ibid). Freedom in this scenario is not constrained. It is not shackled, not enslaved by others.

In asking Valerie to offer opportunities to Rose and other pupils to articulate her views on R.E. I believe I was contributing to the conditions necessary for freedom to blossom, a freedom that encompassed the notions of self-worth and equality and would lead, I hoped, to a quality of love which I previously described in Section one of this chapter as a *"legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible."*

But let me return, momentarily to what Greene (1988: xi) calls *"the making and remaking of a public space, a space of dialogue and possibility."* She explains this 'public space' when she says that:

*In contexts of this kind, open contexts where persons attend to one another with interest, regard, and care, there is a place for the appearance of freedom, the achievement of freedom by people in search of themselves.*

I believe that I have been trying to do what Greene suggests in my educative relationships with Marion, Valerie and Rose (even if at one remove in Rose's case). I have been attending to them *"with interest, regard, and care"*, in order to facilitate *"the achievement of freedom by people in search of themselves."*

In embodying my values of love and care as a legitimate anxiety in order to help others to achieve freedom, I believe I am contributing to what Kennelly (1991: 12), the Irish poet, has to say about freedom:

*I have always associated unbridled, passionate mutterings with freedom. There is something more attractively genuine in such mutterings than in most of the bland interchanges that go by the name of 'communication.' Whenever I see men and women furiously muttering to themselves in the streets of Dublin I am saddened by their loneliness, touched by their sincerity, awed by their freedom.*

I want those with whom I am in educative relationships to have an

unbridled passion for freedom such as I feel I have, a freedom that harms no one, a freedom that gives deliciousness to the personality and hope to others. In my practice with Marion and Valerie I was constantly wondering about what I could do to ensure that this kind of freedom happened.

But let me now return to Valerie and to the possibility created by her, which I believe offered Rose the opportunity to grow towards how Greene (1988: 118) characterises freedom when she refers to it as being about autonomy:

*To be autonomous is to be self-directed and responsible; it is to be capable of acting in accord with internalised norms and principles; it is to be insightful enough to know and understand one's impulses, one's motives, and the influence of one's past.*

Admittedly, this scenario painted by Greene is the results of a lifetime's work, but at least the possibility of its realisation has now been opened up by Valerie for herself, for Rose and for the other pupils.

It applies to me, also. I wish to live out my freedom by being self-directed and responsible. For myself, then, I want my independence, my freedom, to help lead me to mature interdependence, which involves me in learning to set and meet my own expectations rather than seeking to meet the expectation of others. From this statement and from my practice, I am hoping that my view of freedom will be seen to be not only value-oriented, but also, and especially, person-oriented. That it will be seen to be centred for me in respect for and toleration towards others and their views. I am value oriented. I have a definite point of view. In my role as a values-led action researcher, while I might not wish to place too great a stress on the traditions of the past for myself, nevertheless I recognise that young people and their teachers come from various traditions, representative of their communities. I would wish to respect that point of view and claim that those born to it have a right to continue with it, while, of course, having the opportunity of examining and reviewing it. I find I have to continually work at accepting that other people's view of

their work, their frameworks, their beliefs, their values, are valid; that they are relevant for them (Marshall, 1995: 324). If other people's frameworks, beliefs and values are valid and relevant for them, I must take those frameworks, beliefs and values seriously. I constantly need, too, to try and accommodate whatever conflicts and contradictions arise from entertaining these multiple perspectives.

What I am particularly interested in, though, are the methods Valerie used to enable the tradition to which she, Rose and the school belonged, to be continued. They were centred on respect for the person of Rose, for example, and took the form of action enquiry which, by its nature, is open-ended. Through freedom, Rose might actually come to an acceptance of her own tradition. That she might not, would also be for me, an important dimension of her freedom; that she would be able to make choices among alternatives.

Valerie became critical of her previous stance of 'enforcing faith' on her pupils. But she is no more neutral now than she had been previously. What has changed is that she is researching, she is finding out the views of her pupils and she is listening to them. In that respect she is more autonomous in feeling free not to 'enforce.' And she is enabling her pupils to be more autonomous also. As well as paying attention to her tradition, which is that of the pupils and of the school, she is also taking her pupils' views into the equation. In the same way as Valerie listened to me when I asked her to allow Rose to do her own research, so she is listening to her pupils. Rose and others noticed it. Because she felt respected as an individual, Rose's view of how she experienced R.E. changed and she began to enjoy it rather than be bored with, or angry about, it to the point where she was able to say that:

*I think R.E. was a lot more relevant this year than in the previous three years. It was more relevant to me because the subjects were interesting and true to life and later on because we dealt with real problems.*

Although Rose did not refer to it, it also entirely possible I think that her experience of respect from Valerie, the establishment of an I-You

relationship (Buber, 1975) between them, may have enabled her to respect and accept her tradition which it was always Valerie's desire to effect in the first place.

*Rose is looking for a meaning to her life*

It also seems to me that Rose, in her search for freedom to choose, to freely debate and think for herself, is perhaps already engaged in at least two of the requirements the SCAA document (1996) called for and which I duplicate again below:

- \* *the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values.*
- \* *the sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others.*

One of Rose's pathways to that goal of meaning in life, including her quest for 'truth', was the value to her of her freedom to choose. It involved her also perhaps in searching for her own evolving sense of her identity to be recognised and to be respected. Valerie helped Rose in her quest when she decided that she did not want to be an 'enforcer' but rather 'a facilitator of faith,' as she called it. It seems to me that Rose's quest, in its own way, is a mirror of my enquiry. I, too, am on a quest for my 'truth' which certainly involves my freedom to choose. In the process I believe my sense of my identity is evolving to the extent that I am beginning to recognise, affirm and accept myself. In offering for public scrutiny "*a systematic enquiry made public*" (Stenhouse, 1975), as I am doing here, my quest for 'truth' is I believe moved forward significantly not least because of critical academic attention from my Bath Action Research Group but also because of their recognition and respect. I am most able to facilitate this enquiry because of what I learnt from Valerie, Rose and Marion.

Of both Valerie and Rose I believe it could be said, that they were engaged in acting morally in the various ways explained in their individual and collective action enquiries. Perhaps it was their form of spirituality, composed as it was of their emergent values, care and empathy on the part of Valerie and freedom on the part of Rose, that

was the source of it. In that sense, then, the SCAA Document (1996) is right when it says that: *"spirituality can be seen as the source of the will to act morally."* Rose's effort to activate her own spirituality, composed of her value of freedom, apparently involved her also in *"conflict with traditional assumptions about morality"* (SCAA Document 1996). Valerie, in her encouragement to Rose to write about her own 'concerns,' seemed to accept what some SCAA conference delegates believed - that *"Spirituality encompasses an intellectual urge to discovery which may lead to challenging received views"* (ibid).

In this combined though separate enquiry of Rose's, I believe her learning could perhaps be described *"as a spiritual activity"* (SCAA). Certainly from my point of view, it is spiritual in the sense in which *"The human spirit (is) engaged in a search for truth"* (ibid), in which Rose is challenged to explore and develop her own spirituality, comprising her exploration of the value of freedom for her, and thus helping her in her own search for truth.

#### Attempting to move the situation forward

I wrote to Valerie (27th April 1994) and congratulated her on what both she and Rose had achieved. Then I tried to see in what way she might be able to move Rose forward beyond what she had already done. I knew it couldn't happen in that particular school year because it had just terminated. I was hopeful, however, for the following school-year, 1994-1995. In my letter to Valerie I was seeking to help Rose realise the importance of being democratic herself: how *"to stretch her, so to speak."* Among my questions for her were: *"In what way, Rose, would you demonstrate that people are unique for you?"* and, *"If you were a teacher in this class how would you demonstrate your value of encouraging individuality?"* I told Valerie, of course, that: *"I am sure there are better questions than these ones, but I am wondering how could you stretch your girls in the direction of reflecting on their individual spirituality?"* However, on a visit to the school shortly afterwards, Valerie and Marion told me that they would not be continuing in the coming school-year with 'formal'

action research. For various personal and professional reasons they needed a 'break'. They were tired and following the action research cycle closely took a huge amount of their time. The school couldn't offer any alleviation of duties to allow them the extra time they needed to prepare further action enquiries. It was a pity, but understandable!

*'What about the power structures reflected in the actual text itself?'*

I sent a copy of my original M.Phil. report (containing the substance of this chapter) to Zoe Parker (fellow Ph.D. student and lecturer at Kingston University, Surrey). In her reply to me (26th January, 1995), she said she was 'delighted' that Valerie's report had the voices of her pupils *"apparent/audible."* She raised an important question though about: *"what happened to Rose in all this, is she any happier now?"* It wasn't a question I had thought of asking, even though it is perhaps a question to do with friendship, with relationship, with fulfilment. In my text above, my final questions for Rose, via Valerie, were not of that kind; rather were they to do with Rose's capacity to learn to become reflexive.

Zoe also commented on the fact that the *"text starts with your voice and moves through hierarchical layers until we reach the voices of the pupils."* It is only at the end of the report, she points out, that *"we hear from Rose."* Zoe asks: *"Does this raise questions about the power structures reflected in the actual text itself?"*

When I read what Zoe said I felt dismayed that I hadn't thought more about the *"power structures"* in my text. Zoe linked *"hierarchical layers,"* starting with my voice and moving on through to 'the voices of the pupils' with *"power structures."* She is perhaps asking if the *"hierarchical layers,"* which she equates with *"power structures,"* is an anti-democratic structure governing my text? It is true that I instituted a hierarchy in my relationship with the various people involved: me and Marion, Marion and Valerie, and perhaps me and Rose. I did it for practical and pragmatic reasons - I wanted all of



these people to have the opportunity of doing their own research on their own practice and I couldn't think of a better way of managing it, especially as my time too was limited. I continued with 'hierarchy' in terms of the writing up of this study.

I think I could have become tense about Zoe's "*power structures*" question if I had passed over or neglected to include and respond to the voices of the various people coming through in my work, including the students' voices. I don't believe I did that. I deeply wished to respect them as human beings. I attempted to take seriously the people whose voices are heard in this chapter. I attempted to see in what way I had influenced and been influenced by them. If democracy means tolerance of all views, I was being tolerant in attempting to fully respect the people whose voices are heard. If democracy means being egalitarian, I was attempting to show an equality of treatment, equality meaning for me the requisite amount of time and effort I personally judged I needed to give to each of the participants I was dealing with - Marion and Valerie. 'Requisite' means to me making instantaneous judgments regarding the particular circumstances necessary to help move forward the learning of each of the people concerned, including myself.

In attempting to answer Zoe's question, "*what kind of power structures are reflected in my text as it stands?*," I freely admit that it is hierarchical and I am at the apex. I am the writer of this chapter and of this text. However, I want to listen with respect and understanding to the points of view of all those involved in this research. In the end, though, it is my own research and I am taking personal responsibility for it. My originality will come from making my own personal judgments about it, as with my thesis as a whole. I am engaged in that very process now in my argumentation here with Zoe Parker and her views.

I did wonder at various points in my practice whether setting up a hierarchy of relationships (me with Marion, as she acted as tutor to Valerie) inhibited me initially in relating interpersonally with Valerie. Had I, for example, set up an unequal power relationship? In this age

of "political correctness," it is necessary for me to point out that I didn't do so in order that Marion or Valerie would be deprived of their personal power. A hierarchy was already in place and I went along with it. None of the participants had disagreed with it. Perhaps if they had .... but that's another story, and anyway, it's hypothetical.

But let me now consider at more length the issue of power structures, which I think Zoe understands as affecting power relations. In arguing about this issue I do not wish to use the particular terminology that Zoe used. I want to demarcate and name this issue in my own way. In doing so I realise I am using power to define my world (Spender, 1984:194-205). In so doing I hope I am not going to be guilty of *"illustrating patriarchy's power to shape and dominate the world in which women live, and so numb women's consciousness"* (Marshall, 1984:87). I do accept that *"organisational, structural and political back cloths"* shouldn't be *"lost sight of"* in telling women's stories; that *"boundaries, norms and valued goals are established and labels assigned"* in the places where women work (Marshall, 1995:18-19). I also realise that my enquiry here involves two women teachers and their pupils, who are young women. My correspondent, Zoe, is a woman too. And I am a man!

At the risk of being labelled as simplistic or worse naive, I am suggesting that there is another way I can proceed. Can't I consider this issue of *"power structures"* or *"power relations"* at the level of the interpersonal, at the level of the inter-relational? In so doing I can lay aside at least momentarily all *"organisational, structural and political back cloths."* Being sensitive is, for me, a relational issue, a personal issue. And it is at the level of the personal and the relational that I believe that most of my energy should be and indeed was directed. I can do something about an issue that is personal. To try to do something about an issue that is 'political' may reduce my energy unnecessarily and come to no good anyway. But perhaps at the end of it all I may still come to agree that the 'personal is political'! But that's in *Chapt. 3*.

When I received Marion's and Valerie's research reports (May, 1994)

they were hierarchically structured, with "*power structures*," "*power relations*" perhaps embedded in them. Rather than concentrate on the import of the "*power structures*," "*power relations*" or "*hierarchy*" perhaps built into these research reports, I felt it was more important to concentrate on what various individuals had positively achieved in terms of the personal, of the relational, and in terms of values like freedom, independence and interdependence.

For me, "*power structures*" or "*power relations*" is like an 'outsider' concept, a hegemonic, dominant and dominating concept, like 'patriarchy' itself, which insists on being heard. I am not, however, saying that Zoe is doing this. I am only saying that this particular phrase has these kinds of connotations for me. It appears to be telling me: "*Beware of breaking the rules and regulations, the norms of the present form of 'political correctness!'*" For myself, I am committed not so much to rules, regulations or tradition, but to others and their well-being in the existential here and now. While listening and paying respectful attention to Zoe's point of view, I am here insisting on my own point of view which is an 'insider' one to do with my individual action enquiry and the inter-related individual action enquiries of others. Issues that arise are, or become, personal, relational issues. Any difficulties involved are resolved locally and interpersonally as Valerie has shown with her students, particularly with Rose. My stance - and perhaps that of the others too - is one derived from holding values of love and freedom, authenticity and integrity, negating them in my practice, improving or changing them appropriately so that I may renew my practice of them. It is reciprocal too in that I may be - and indeed was - challenged internally by Marion within my research as to my behaviour and meanings.

Zoe's concern about "*the power structures reflected in the actual text itself*" is, I now realise, a concern of less importance to me than how I am treating others practically and relationally as individuals. It is not that Zoe's concern is not important, it is. But I am making choices here, choices about local issues about which I can do something! I am not implying by this that Zoe wasn't concerned. Of course she was. She wouldn't have written as she did, with her

customary honesty, if she weren't. She is as concerned as I am for the 'democratisation' of my action research practice so that the voices of the pupils could be clearly heard. But for me, democracy, *"power structures,"* and so on, are really about interpersonal relational values negotiated on the ground constantly and consistently between me and others and between teachers and students, and vice versa. For me they are issues that I, and others I am involved with, can do something practically about within our local individual practices.

I cannot underestimate what Valerie did, giving her pupils a voice, regardless of the order in which these voices appeared in my text. Ruddock (1996:3) suggests there are two reasons why teachers tend not to make space for students' voices or give serious attention to what they say: *"one is tradition and the other is anxiety."* She feels that traditionally, students were not viewed as partners in the educational enterprise. There is the view too that pupils don't have the capacity to pass judgments on their education. So Ruddock sympathises with teachers who, she says, *"may, understandably, be nervous about inviting evaluative comments from pupils; negative experiences are usually more sharply etched in our memories than positive ones and are easier to talk about."* She recognises too that teachers may be anxious that their students' comments will be personalised.

Despite tradition and anxiety, Valerie not only allowed but positively encouraged her students to articulate their dissatisfactions about R.E. They took full advantage of her permission and encouragement as her report shows. They did this not only through the letters Valerie solicited from them but also orally in the classroom. The point is that, through Valerie's planning and mutual help and cooperation, the R.E. class for her students was turned around. And they played a very active part with Valerie in bringing that about.

Regarding the report she read, Zoe points out that from a reader perspective, she has *"the power to play with the text, I can start at the end, I can ask questions that aren't in the text, I can speculate about*

*what happens to individuals."* And she goes on to say, *"I can be disappointed when I don't hear from them again."* She is wondering, for example, if Rose *"thinks / knows about her appearance in Ben's text,"* and if she did, *"would she want a chance to say something more to us?"*

It is a question that is hypothetical now, unfortunately. Rose can no longer talk to us about her concerns - at least in this text. In that sense, Zoe is right. Rose was dependent on being included in Valerie's report in order to be heard in my text. If Valerie stopped doing action research, so would Rose, at least in the sense of an enquiry being made public (Stenhouse, 1975). So to that extent because Valerie has stopped, so Rose's voice is stopped - at least in this text! However, for the comparatively brief time when her voice was heard publicly, it was clear to me that her teacher, Valerie, who had institutional power, used it to facilitate Rose's voice, allowing it to be heard, not only publicly, but also internally within the classroom, as she struggled with issues of democracy and freedom. Rose might or might not be satisfied with the placing of her voice in my text. She was satisfied, though, with the offer from Valerie to write about her own concerns and to get a public airing for them with a sympathetic teacher and class, and presumably to get it included also in my chapter here, even if embedded in Valerie's text. But can I answer Zoe's final question about Rose: *"is she any happier now?"* In so far as I can answer it for somebody else, I believe that Rose achieved the measure of freedom she sought, a freedom consonant with her personal development, a freedom that finally affiliated her to R.E. as it was taught and learned in Valerie's classroom.

### Some final thoughts

At this point (20th June, 1999) I am returning again, even if only briefly, to Zoe Parker's concern that my enquiry started *"with your voice and moves through hierarchical layers until we reach the voices of the pupils."* It is clear to me at this point that I did not pay as much attention as I could have to Zoe's concern about power structures,

hierarchical layers, power relations. Rather, I went on the defensive. While I defended the inclusion of Rose's voice, I was also defending the status quo, that is, the current kinds of hierarchy that operate in many, if not most, institutions including schools. Perhaps I could have been braver and have interrupted existing power relations, including *"hierarchical layers."*

But in order to do so, I would have had to take van Manen's (1988: xv) view seriously that *"our best examples must be ourselves."* My level of awareness at the time all this was happening wasn't as heightened as it could have been. Certainly, I hadn't understood the subtleties of meaning that were available to me then, as I do now. Because I was delighted that Valerie agreed to include Rose's voice in her enquiry, I neglected the larger picture to do with the amount of voice Rose was allowed and, also, how her voice was to be depicted - at the lowest rung of the existing hierarchy. When I heard Zoe articulating these as legitimate concerns I wasn't ready to hear. But, I am now listening. I am listening avidly to Kohli (1989: 105-106), and hearing her and Zoe's voice as Kohli says:

*Whose voices are heard? Whose are silenced and why? What are the power relations that open or close access to conversations, whether spoken or written? .... What conditions must be obtained for those who have been silenced to feel safe in dialogue? .... What prior agreements need to be established to ensure a place where each person can speak her or his own mind and heart? What does a teacher need to know, feel, experience, in order to provide mutuality and reciprocity among diverse voices?*

It wasn't only that Rose hadn't sufficient space within which she could speak her mind and heart fully. It wasn't only that I wouldn't directly confront how I hierarchically structured the work I sent Zoe. I also feel I silenced Zoe's legitimate request that I think again about how I structured my text. Because I didn't think reflectively about Zoe's idea at the time, I now feel I silenced her. I now feel I exercised power relations in doing so, the power relations involved in my defensive argument above. I contradicted in my practice my desire to offer a creative freedom. And all of this notwithstanding my own experience of power relations in relation to the 'conflict' I experienced at the college where I worked (1990-1995, in chapter 5). I am hoping

that in my future work I will be more alert to the importance "of being (more) *an example myself*" of fairness, balance and empathy and that I will interrupt existing power relations, including my own, for the sake of others. This is especially the case when others are voiceless or are not given the requisite amount of voice that indicates they are being taken seriously.

It seems to me that my belated recognition that I silenced Zoe's voice should cause me again to emphasise my need to practise the freedom I say I need for my own creativity. Others need to be enfranchised with freedom, too. Those who come in contact with me need it in order for their creativity to be released. This is true because, as Berdyaev (in Macquarrie, 1972: 180) puts it: "*freedom is almost identical with existence itself.*" Berdyaev's view of freedom is important to me as a person and as a teacher educator:

*Berdyaev and other existentialists are passionately insistent that freedom is to be preserved and increased. And the reason for this is clear. If freedom is almost identical with existence itself, there is no humanity without freedom. Freedom may be dangerous (because it may degenerate into chaos), but there is no human dignity without freedom, and the risk of increasing freedom must constantly be taken.*

Following Berdyaev (in Lowrie, 1956: 136-147), I believe that freedom is necessary for others and myself so that we can continually create ourselves. I passionately believe that I should try and enable every person with whom I come in contact to be, and become, creative, despite the 'living contradictions' that occur in my practice, as with Zoe in this instance. While I believe that an undisciplined creativity could lead to chaos, nevertheless, I also believe that it is my creativity which makes me distinctively human.

In exercising my creativity I believe, too, that my self-transcendence takes place. By that I mean what Macquarrie (in Bacik, 1992: 74) means when he says it is to do with "*our fundamental capacity to direct our own personal existence*" and to shape our lives. So, transcendence and freedom are linked. Therefore, because I have some freedom, I am not entirely constrained by the determining

forces of nature, I can create a better world for myself and others. In my educative relationships with Marion, with Valerie, with Rose and with Zoe too, I wanted freedom and love to flourish so that their creativity - and mine, too - could blossom. However, I have learned a valuable lesson, both from Zoe and from Valerie: freedom and love are linked to recognising the importance of difference and separateness, it is an awareness that lets me see that others own themselves. I have learned from Zoe Parker the importance of interrupting "*power relations*" in order that a more just situation may take place.

At various times I corresponded with Valerie but she didn't answer. Perhaps she felt that her educative relationship with Marion was sufficient. When I met her at her school we always had pleasant but short conversations. I felt, however, the lack of response to my queries. But now I feel that my relationship with Valerie, which began in freedom and continued in freedom, should also end in freedom for me. Somehow the need for personal boundaries hadn't impinged on my consciousness. Valerie had obviously decided that not corresponding was one of the boundaries she would demarcate for me, a boundary signifying the need to be different, to have the right to do things differently. Finally the light dawned on me: Valerie is different from me, she is rightly exercising her freedom by showing me the importance of difference to her. Just as she encouraged her pupil, Rose, to learn her own meaning to freedom, so she is perhaps showing me her particular aspect of freedom - the right to be different and that I should see it as a gift that will enhance my learning.

#### *Addressing two of my claims to educational knowledge*

In this chapter I have been addressing, through my descriptions and explanations of my relationships with Zoe, Marion, Valerie and Rose, two distinct and original claims (see Abstract) I make to educational knowledge:



*I show the meaning of my values as I explain my educative relationships in terms of how I dialectically engage the intrapersonal with the interpersonal.*

and,

*I show how a dialectic of both care and challenge that is sensitive to difference, is enabling me to create my own living educational theory which is a form of improvisatory self-realisation.*

When I received Zoe Parker's criticism about the "*hierarchical layers*" apparent in this chapter, I went on the defensive and didn't realise for some years that my defensive position had all but silenced her voice. I had become a 'living contradiction', holding the values of care and freedom but denying them in my practice. I was horrified when I finally came to realise that I had been using oppressive power relations towards Zoe of the kind that I believe sometimes sustains hierarchy (chapter 5) and "*hierarchical layers*" too. Instead of striving for liberation for Zoe, others and myself, I was, as Freire (Freire and Macedo, 1998) puts it, tending to become an oppressor. I only became free from oppression when I wrote about liberating Zoe's voice and simultaneously learned from her insight about "*power relations*."

A fellow feeling with Marion regarding her "*voicelessness*" when she was young convinced me anew of her "*inalienable value*," and moved me towards affirming her in order "*to make her strong*" for her own sake, but also so that she could take up a position of support to her colleague, Valerie, as the latter attempted to undertake her first action enquiry. My own support for Marion helped me to both declare and show in my actions towards her that: "*My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible.*"

At my instigation, Valerie facilitated her student, Rose, to write about her concern about freedom. I then experienced Rose's liberated voice. In listening to Rose's voice, I recognised that she had enlarged for me the value of freedom to choose, as she declaimed her need to

be free in order that she could choose.

Valerie, as R.E. teacher, facilitated Rose's value of freedom at my instigation, even though my initial perception of her decision not to reply to my letters, nor to seek meetings with me, was that she was "silencing" me. As I was reflecting and writing this chapter, I came to accept that Valerie was perhaps "*showing me her particular aspect of freedom - the right to be different.*" My recognition of Valerie's right to be different - an aspect of freedom - enhanced my learning as I continued to create my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

In writing this chapter I came to realise that the dialectic of care and challenge, which was sensitive to difference, wasn't in my hands alone. I, too, had been dialectically challenged with care and sensitivity by Zoe, Marion, Valerie, and Rose in different ways.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with 'John'?**

**Summary** I enter into an educative relationship with 'John', who is an experienced secondary teacher in a large (700-student) all-boys' secondary college in a small rural town in Ireland.

John is strongly independent. He neither sought nor did I initially offer suggestions as to what area of his classroom practice he might improve. I waited to see what role would emerge for me in our educative relationship. I decided that challenge would be part of the loving affirmation and compassionate understanding that I wished to practise towards him. My compassion is not about certitude but about a vulnerability that seeks to integrate the 'inner' and the 'outer' me. My compassion is linked with a contemplation (loving affirmation) that relies not so much on a set of beliefs but on "*an opening to love*" (Merton in Padovano, 1984).

Eventually a series of openings provide the incentive for me to challenge John. One is my perception that John's pupils sometimes appear to be inert, to be passive in their learning. Another is my ongoing perception that John possesses fears that need alleviation. I intuit that if I challenge what I perceive to be the passivity of John's pupils, the alleviation of his fears may also begin to happen. And I had another tantalising question too: in tackling the passivity of John's pupils in order to bring about change in that and in John's fears, is there a way in which my own personal relationship with my God could become manifest in my relationship with John?

I move towards what could have been a rupture in our relationship because of the starkness and determination of my challenge to John about my perception of the passivity of his pupils. This challenge, though painful, becomes a moment of catharsis for him and for me, which he acknowledges. A catharsis that leads John to believe that

perhaps he can rid himself of at least some of his fears. It leads to me discovering how my living engagement with my God is part of the interweaving of my values in my educative relationships with John and others. A living engagement in which I encounter "*a mysterious something*" that is not identical with me, but which is partly independent of me (Rahner in Morea, 1997). A "*mysterious something*" that I now call God. In finding God a-new I find a new identity, an integrity, a wholeness that is helping me to move towards self-actualisation.

### Introducing John to action research

John, a secondary teacher, who lived some one hundred and fifty miles from the college in Ireland where I worked, visited it on Tuesday, 15th February, 1994, expecting to be coming to his first ever action research meeting. When he arrived he found the meeting had been cancelled. I met him, however, and our encounter lasted for three-and-a-half hours, as he told me afterwards! In the conversation I explained what action research was about. It had to do with asking how my personal educational values were being denied in my practice. Why should I be concerned about this? Could I imagine what I would do about it? What action plan would I then carry out? And so on. In fact I went through the Whitehead action research cycle (1993:180-182). I suggested that John purchase and read McNiff (1988) and Hopkins (1985). Though I had given him Jack Whitehead's published papers I also suggested that he buy and read Whitehead's now published book (1993).

### John and self-knowledge

During the course of our conversation I also intuited that it would be a good idea to offer John some of my own completed pieces of enquiry as well as my reflections on them. These included two volumes of my journal which I had completed to date and the original report on which chapter 2 of my thesis was based. I did so for a number of reasons. If I were to be involved in an educative relationship with John over time I wished to try and preserve some form of equality between us by both offering and receiving 'critical' views and questions. This would be more likely to happen, I felt, where each of us was familiar with each other's work. But, as well as the issue of equality, like Palmer (1998:2), I believe that "*Teaching (and being in educative relationships), like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse.*" It doesn't depend ultimately on skill or information. Rather it is an activity that comes from the inside out. Here below is how Palmer (ibid, p. 2) puts it:

*teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that*

*mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge - and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.*

I hoped that my educative relationship with John would enable me to know myself better so that, in turn, I could improve my educative relationships with him and others.

*What was my function regarding John's enquiry?*

What was the main conviction that lingered with me from my first meeting with John? It was that John was strongly independent. He neither sought, nor did I offer suggestions, as to what area of his classroom practice he might wish to enquire into with the aim of bringing about change and improvement. I strongly felt he was going to do that himself. What function, if any, then did I feel I had? I would have to wait to see what role would emerge for me in our educative relationship. And I was willing to wait for that to happen. Waiting and being willing to wait is a part of what I am now calling loving affirmation, albeit silent. For me, it also includes compassionate understanding. When Pat D'Arcy (an earlier fellow Ph.D student at Bath) read these phrases in my Summary to this chapter she objected (June, 1998) because she felt they resonated with 'pity' or 'sympathy' which are patronising! I agree with Pat and want to see can I explain the phrases in a way which removes that resonance.

I am taking 'compassionate understanding' first, and will then include 'loving affirmation' as part of my explanation. I know the standard dictionary definition of 'compassion' is possibly the meaning to which Pat alludes, one that defines it as 'sympathy', or 'pity'. If it is, I cringe at these meanings. For me, compassionate understanding is to do with my sympathetic understanding of myself in the first instance. A compassion not about certitude but about vulnerability as I come to believe in a new God of my own understanding, within or without religion. A compassion that seeks to integrate the 'inner' and 'outer' me, doing so not by teaching or

mentoring, but by learning. And it is linked with contemplation in which I seek my 'real' self and harmony with God and others. I am on a journey then towards my 'real' self which includes God and others. On the journey I rely, not on *"doctrine but a way of being in the world .... not a set of beliefs but an opening to love"* (Merton in Padovano, 1984: 76). I am relying on John's and my dialogical conversation to provide that *"opening to love"* in which *"loving affirmation,"* including challenge, will be the sign of my sensitivity to accepting John as a separate and individual self.

### John's concerns

Writing to me on 9th March, 1994, John told me that he was concerned about his chemistry class of twenty-one final year students, ten of whom had failed a chemistry test he had given them on 9th November, 1993 (six got honours and five passed). He had given them a questionnaire to see how he might improve the situation. Even though he hadn't got it fully processed at the time of writing, nevertheless he had some tentative findings from it concerning his own teaching. He said that: *"it seems to be pointing towards:- more student participation; me going slower; encouraging them to believe in the value of studying notes at home."* His initial enquiry then was into his own teaching and not, immediately, his students' learning. I might have preferred that he reversed his goals - that he would take his students' learning first - but because I had mentally decided to accept his priorities, I went along with it. There would be opportunities, I was sure, where I could talk about issues to do with the students' learning.

When John visited me at the college where I worked on 1st November, 1994, his visit gave both of us an opportunity to explain to one another what John's enquiry meant to him and to see where he'd move from there. Prior to seeing me, John had sent me a critique of his work from an academic at an Irish university. While highly praising the work, the academic had said:

*I wonder if John, in his professed love of numbers, overuses this*

*technique in his analysis. Perhaps if the work had more 'rich description' pieces based on systematic observations, presented in a discursive style displaying patterns of actions, then the statistics might assume a more balanced and meaningful place.*

In his covering note to me, John had agreed with the academic when he said: *"I agree there is room for more 'rich description' pieces and less emphasis on statistics,"* but he went on to say also that: *"I believe we have already discussed this."* Indeed we had - mostly on the telephone!

Yes, it was true. Many pages of the report seemed to be made up of tables and lists and there was little discursive style apparent. I would have liked to have got more of a 'feel' for how John's students were receiving what he was doing and how their learning had improved as a result. I felt I needed it more from their mouths than filtered, as it was, through at least two questionnaires, "eight behaviours" and lists of tables.

At our meeting, John agreed that:

*I relied too much on questionnaires. I think that now. There's too much of single mode, if that's the word.*

At the same time, I also learned that the *"imagined solutions"* that John put into effect did come from the students. As John said: *"I didn't emphasise enough that those imagined solutions came from the students."* And for me, this was particularly important in the light of the fact that John had emphasised that *"participatory democracy ... and respect"* were among the values he held and which he wanted his practice to show forth. He had achieved these values I believed. As I said on the tape to him:

*You referred to (your values) frequently throughout .... you were totally consistent. The imagined solutions arose out of a lot of stuff the students said and this was paralleled or fitted into the values that you stated early on.*

John made no secret of the fact that he wished to prepare his students as well as possible for the Irish Leaving Certificate. His



enquiry was designed to help his students achieve success in it. While accepting that this aim was important, I also wondered would he in the future be able to move further than that idea. For example, could he see himself considering what was it of "value" and "what you mean by their taking responsibility for their own learning?" John, in his reply, was clear that:

*my teaching, relationship is by far the most important part - the relationship that I have with students. Now, I suppose I wanted them to become more involved. I'm constantly trying to get students more involved in their own learning ....*

I was interested in how John might move forward in terms of continuing to create an improved climate for communication with his students in a way that would lead to their enhanced learning. I remembered from his report that homework was a 'problem' that John's students had highlighted when they spoke about it being difficult to study, to motivate themselves; that they needed more time, more discipline, and so on. John's response was to give them "Some Solutions" that comprised a list of 'do's' and 'don't's'. They were subsumed under some sub-headings such as: "Managing time, exercise, distractions, discipline, etc." I wondered how efficacious these were because they comprised the ideas and thoughts of the teacher alone, of John alone. I wondered if he could get his students to come up with their own descriptions and explanations of how they studied. For example, I suggested to John that he

*get them to reflect on what they actually do during that particular time and if they came up with: 'I was totally distracted', that he try and get them to find out why they were totally distracted. Could they, for example, name all the things that caused the distractions?, etc., etc .... Instead of giving them pat answers.*

John agreed, saying that his sub-headings, "Managing time," etc., weren't intended as pat answers; that "there's definitely room for further exploration there and for drawing stuff out from them, more so than suggesting answers myself."

#### Continuation and new beginnings

I wrote very soon after our meeting (7th November, 1994) in order to let John know that his visit to me was a 'tonic' and said:

*Your visit brought me back to life after a long period since Summer dealing with administrative and organisational matters...Imagine my elation during our interview when you said, 'asking questions is keeping me alive' and when you later said, 'doing a little bit of research is one way of helping to keep me alive'. They should be key words in everybody's lexicon, I reckon.*

In my letter I was still feeling a little wary of statistics, wary of lists and tabular information and, at this point, what I consider premature quoting of the words of authors on the grounds that they could obscure not only students' voices but John's own voice. I am really anxious to hear John's own voice, to hear him making his own personal statements on various issues because, as I tell him:

*I believe you are deeply reflective but, as yet, you may not feel or believe that your own ideas, feelings and, so on, are worthwhile to others. The fact is, the world is calling out for people like you to tell them what your experiences are like; what works for you, what does not and the whys of these issues - all in your own words and the words of your pupils and 'critical' friends.*

I went on to consolidate what I believe John was now learning about representing his own and others' voices in his accounts. I took advantage of his reference to the importance of dialogue thus:

*I have to say I was elated - it was music to my ears - when in a discussion on your Questionnaires you endorsed the importance of dialogue (when you said): I see there are things that can arise in dialogue ....*

Notwithstanding my reservation about the use of statistics I feel a great need to let John know also that he has the right to conduct his research in his own way. If my support is to offer him maximum freedom - which I want it to do - I have to fully respect his independence of action. After all, what use is my educative relationship to him if I deny him a right to grow and develop independently of me? And so I add:

*Incidentally, the reason I did not oppose your introduction of quantitative research methods during last year was that I felt strongly that you had an 'unassailable and inalienable' right to make your own decisions. I do feel deeply that I must respect your right to decide how you wish to do things even if I then make contrary suggestions!*

I move on to the concerns that arose in our conversation of 1st November. There was, for example, John's wish to do something about his chemistry 'practicals' in the coming year. *"Doing these 'practicals,'" he told me on tape, "gives me energy I sometimes wouldn't get in an ordinary classroom situation that I teach."* He added: *"It's more of a shared experience than straightforward teaching."* Then I asked him to formulate an action research question around that concern thus: *"How would you put your question? For example: 'How would I .... ?'"*

John had also raised his concern about feeling stressed whenever he was asked to be in charge of study in the Study Hall of his college. He referred to feeling *"quite stressful"; "under pressure"; "a lot depends on your own tiredness and mood and so on"; "you haven't got the same control";* and of his need to learn *"to cope."* John had moved towards the beginning of formulating his question about this concern, thus: *"How would I supervise the Study Hall in as humane a way as possible .... while resolving conflict that may arise .... ?"*

I felt there was something about the issue and meaning of 'control' that perhaps John also needed to look at. So I asked him:

*What do you mean by control? .... I think it would be good for your own reflection to raise all kinds of questions about words like 'control,' 'learning to cope,' and how could you imagine what 'supervision in a humane way' would look like in practice?*

Finally, there was the issue of communication - or was it an issue of justice that preoccupied John? He put it to me in the form of a question: *"Do I communicate with the students I find intelligent any differently to the other students or could I bring other students in more?"*

I added that I would be delighted to get his feedback at some time on

my effectiveness as a mentor to him. Among my concerns would be how John experienced me in conversation; how I had helped or hindered him in his enquiries and how we would maintain contact for the future. Responding to me on 11th November, 1994. John said:

*You certainly encourage me to 'speak with my own voice' and also to tease out what is my own 'voice'. I am excited by this .... Last year (academic year) I remember getting a real lift when hearing from you that what teachers have to say is of value, in particular, that what I have to say is of value.*

He had moved on in terms of formulating a question that he felt would move all his enquiries forward in the new school year:

*How can I with students, 'critical' friends, and other companions learn to listen more fully to, and act more effectively on, our internal inspirations thus helping to nurture a more holistic approach and experience in our lives within the school environment?*

I did not tend to send John many letters as he telephoned me frequently - and still does in 1998. However, his letters to me arrived frequently and their contents became some of the topics we discussed on the 'phone.

I am constantly aware of, and frequently alerted to, John's desire to be his own person, to be master of his own destiny, to care for himself. In a letter of 24th November, 1994, he said:

*I genuinely don't want to be 'overloaded'. Oftentimes I pressurise myself .... I hear a very clear invitation to take it easy and to be sure and make time for quiet times and time for being with other people.*

John's responds to my writings and mentions some of his own personal and intellectual concerns

Regarding the journals and early writing I had given John, here is some of what he said about them (5th April, 1994). I am quoting what he said below because I believe it may have some relevance for

him regarding his own values and his representation of them in his writing. Referring to his reading of my earlier work on which chapter 1 of my thesis is based, John said:

*Your integrity comes through in your writing. I am particularly challenged by your openness .... I am a little frightened by it also - in that I am wary of being too open myself in case I get hurt.*

I realise I'll have to be very careful, very compassionate in how I deal with issues that John considers to be private. I conjecture that he may have been hurt in the past and that it has taken time to get over it. Anyway I'm delighted when John adds about my early writing: "Your level of depth is striking as is your power of analysis." I was pleasantly surprised to be reminded that I had a capacity for analysis. Because I am learning that John's intellectual and conceptual prowess is an important gift to him, I am not surprised when he concludes about my writing also that:

*I can certainly pick up Roger's three fundamentals for wholesome relationships in your writing - your love of other people (unconditional positive regard), empathy and genuineness.*

He also cautions me too, however:

*In getting to know someone, Ben, I am afraid of talking too deeply too soon. The last time we met we talked for three-and-a-half hours (14th February, 1994) at a fairly intense level. I am still integrating what went on.*

In the next part of his letter he told me about a dream he once had. It was a dream that he had mentioned to me twice already and I took it very seriously. In face-to-face meetings and on the telephone, I asked him to seriously consider pursuing it again. Here is his dream:

*The dream of doing a doctorate has been with me for 17 years - in fact it was in October 1975 (19 years ago) that I gave up doing a Ph.D. .... after six weeks - finding the area of study totally meaningless for me .... The possibility arising again for actualising a dream both disturbs and attracts me.*

Because I had gently been guiding John to begin to dream again, he added:

*Regarding action research I consider you my mentor .... regarding what I write up in June (1995) and the possibility of contact with Jack Whitehead I will need your assistance as a critical friend and mentor.*

I felt deeply moved by John's confidence in me and was determined that a sign of the fulfilment of his confidence in me would be his eventual choice to pursue his doctorate once again, but this time, one that would honour him, his personal knowledge, and his work with his students in his school.

In a letter to me (26th November, 1994) here is what John said of some of my thesis writing:

*.... (it) reads very well. It is full of drive and energy and rich description. You come through as a vibrant and 'fully alive' person who challenges people (including yourself) in the good sense - that is, in a way that wants to nurture.*

I am hoping that I will be able to nurture John, too, enabling him to preserve his independence, while also challenging him. And I am also challenged by the values he strongly holds and which I feel he lives out with his pupils. Here is how he put some of them to me in 1995 (3rd March):

*How can I be as caring as possible? I think so often I can become constricted by settling into a role. So I want to care for students, they are persons .... I suppose too there would be the value of democracy. But it's not just democracy, it's really listening .... really listening to what's coming from their worlds and to, in some way, encourage them to realise that they can help shape their own world.*

#### John's recent research includes a video of some of his work

In referring to his current research work dealing with conflict when he is managing the School Study Hall, he puts it in the form of a question thus: "How do I act justly?" He also facilitates four senior prefects as they work with junior students, helping them to shape their own role. Regarding homework, he is enabling three students to

research it for themselves. They have completed a questionnaire for him and he is presently audio taping their comments. He is going, as he puts it,

*to start an exploration regarding learning and my teaching with three of my honours mathematics class - three very bright lads - could they teach me something about learning and about teaching?*

When he met me on 4th January, 1995, he reviewed his research enquiries and added, regarding my help to him: *"You have been a great help, you know .... encouraging me to be more confident in what I'm doing."* I was pleased to know I was being of some 'use' to John in his enquiries.

For some time, though, I also noticed that our dialogue about what John was doing didn't appear to me to be 'open.' At least in the sense that I understand it to be about a dialectic of question and answer, where the answer begets a new question, and so the cycle goes on. John would tell me what he was doing and I would ask questions. But he would repeat what he was doing without apparently 'hearing' my questions. My responsibility, I felt, was then to leave it to John. This was his enquiry. He was in charge of it. He had every right to decide how he was going to do it. That included accepting or rejecting questions about it from me. However, I never decided that I wouldn't challenge him when the occasion arose in order to help him to keep open to alternatives he may not have considered. My interest was in seeing how he might be able to go beyond where he was now.

Before visiting me on 2nd March 1995, John told me he was bringing a video with him for me to view. In it I would see him teaching what he called a 'peculiar' problem to his maths class. Our audio-taped conversation on the day showed we spent a lot of time talking about the video that we both viewed together. John's 'peculiar' problem with maths was that he found he was unable to work through a sequence of steps to a problem he had posed his class. The following is a portion of our conversation:

*Ben        I didn't detect any fear .... I never got an impression at*

*any stage that you minded they (the students) ....  
having suggestions. In fact you invited it.*

**John**      *Well, I actually needed them.*

**Ben**      *You needed them. And that impressed me .... whatever  
inhibitions they might have had - my impression was  
that it wasn't coming from you .... it was the peer  
pressure.*

I am trying to clarify for myself why it is that I don't feel entirely satisfied with what I'm seeing on the video. It is nothing to do with John not knowing the 'answer' to the maths problem he himself revealed. It is nothing either to do with how the students viewed John. It was evident to me that they greatly respected him. No. One of the things I wondered about was the nature of the maths problem being tackled, and its 'usefulness' or otherwise. Its usefulness certainly wasn't evident to me. Had it got use value, in other words? Here is how I put it:

*I wondered about the 'usefulness' (of the maths problem), it sounded so abstract. And do they (the students) mind? In a sense it does tax your brain, doesn't it? I mean it's an intellectual game in a sense, isn't it?*

Maybe that was part of the 'answer' I was seeking, but didn't see at the time: maybe this particular maths problem was "*an intellectual game?*" What's wrong with an intellectual game if it extends John's students' minds? Wouldn't their being able to come up with an answer to a complex problem be a 'useful' skill to have? Anyway John answered thus:

*I don't know any practical applications of what I was doing myself there in the ratio test. Certainly, in differentiation there are practical applications in maximum and minimum problems, like for an engineer: maximising the strength of a beam; building a channel tunnel minimising the cost of materials .... I would try to bring in practical applications whenever I can, you know.*

But did John tell his students that? In any case, I wouldn't let up. There was still something bothering me about the video and I was struggling within myself to articulate it. I said to John:



*Your manner with the lads was so pleasant and inviting and helpful .... On the other hand, I had this strong feeling that there was fierce control, d'you know .... Now, whether it was the video camera was controlling them or whether it was that there was something about your personality that they settle into whatever convention you might decide is the convention for this class. I couldn't make out what it was.*

As was usual with him, John answered with great integrity, saying:

*I think I would be fairly strict in class to be honest, you know. At the same time, I would try to be fair. Also, this is my second year having them.*

He was right. Most teachers probably need to feel in 'control' of their classes. There was nothing there that needed an explanation. But I was still looking for something that somehow dissatisfied me.

However, I tried another tack with John:

*What did you feel yourself was the aim in a general way when you decided to video (this maths class)? Or was it just, more or less, to see what happened and see at the end what you might draw out of what you had seen?*

John answered, saying: "It was just to have a look at it and maybe there's something that I might spot there that maybe I never thought of, you know." "Fair enough," I said to myself. I would have done the same. My dilemma was, however, what was it that was disquieting me? Maybe I wanted to do precisely what John said was his aim: "I might spot something there that maybe I never thought of, you know." I was wondering, though, how maths itself is made interesting to students in that, for example, they can see its 'usefulness'. Our conversation took the following turn:

**Ben**      *I marvel that this crowd of highly intelligent people, including yourself, would be willing to work away at how these problems are worked out.*

**John**      *The answer is utilitarian .... because the primary usefulness of it is that there's the Leaving Cert (The equivalent of the British A Level) .... There is a question on it (in the State Examination in June).*

John, afterwards, realised that the 'peculiar' maths problem he was trying to solve was an error in the textbook he and his class were using. It couldn't be solved by the ratio test which he and his class were attempting to do in the video. On the same day, however, John actually solved the problem during lunch using the "*comparison test*" and gave it to his class during the afternoon lesson on the same day.

In coming to terms with understanding what I was seeing on the tape, I finally I got to a word that, for me, somehow described some of what I thought I was seeing - there was a lack of curiosity. So I said:

*(Your students) are actually incurious, incurious as to where this goes .... (their) world has narrowed down to being able to give reasonably narrow answers.*

John didn't agree:

*You'd want to ask them, you know .... in their minds it may be there .... (but) for them, the usefulness of it is that it is part of the ticket to get to university eventually, you know.*

Neither John nor I were wrong. He was right, and I was right. He was right in that he was preparing his students to get sufficiently high marks in their Leaving Certificate so that they could qualify to get into faculties like engineering at university. He was also right when he said at some stage that: "*there is intrinsic beauty within the subject of maths when you realise that there is more than one way of looking at something.*" But I was right too. The students, in my view, were entitled to an education that, while it embraced the Leaving Certificate (*passim*), also enlarged their minds beyond the examination itself or a university course it might lead to. I wanted an education for the students that offered them the opportunity to use knowledge as a tool to understand their world and to make informed judgments about it. I was concerned that they have greater opportunities for doing so.

At this point, however, I also feel a need to take on board some of what Chris Woodhead (Chief Inspector of Schools for England and

Wales) says, in an article to the The Times (16 April, 1998). He argues that *"basic knowledge of the different subject disciplines needs to be taught if we want the next generation to understand anything about anything."* I have no quarrel with that. I believe that acquiring facts and information can, among other desirable goals, bring *"satisfaction and enjoyment."* He adds that *"Knowing a little about the nature of science may help .... to come to informed, personal judgments in later life on the scientific controversies of the day."* I have no problem with basic information and facts being transmitted to students. What I do cavil at is that young people are only entitled to know and *"understand"* transmitted information from the past. They needn't make *"informed"* and *"personal judgments"* until *"later in life!"* I believe that is a denial of forms of learning that could enable them to grow in maturity. I believe students should have the right to develop their powers of judgment, discernment and discrimination as part of their education. I think it is patronising to suggest that they don't need to make these kinds of judgment until later in life.

My dissatisfaction with Woodhead's views had, I suppose, to do with my view of curriculum, of knowledge, of why students are in school. It has something to do with their learning to have a better understanding of themselves and of their world. I subscribe to Elliott's (1998: xiii) view that curriculum exists to enable pupils:

*to deepen and extend their understanding of the problems and dilemmas of everyday life in society, and to make informed and intelligent judgments about how they might be resolved.*

One caveat I would have to Elliott's view as he expressed it above (though, of course, I'm sure he wouldn't exclude it) is that I would like students to have the opportunity to deepen and extend their understanding of the problems and dilemmas of their lives as they experience them in their classrooms and school. That is part of their immediate life. In any case I feel that the curriculum, whether it be maths or indeed any other subject should, as Elliott (1998: xiii) puts it:

*be responsive to the students' own thinking and their emergent understandings and insights into human situations.*

I suppose I was looking for this kind of responsiveness on John's video: how would I see the students developing their powers of judgment, discernment and discrimination? I did see some students offering various "*solutions*" to John for his "*judgment, discernment and discrimination.*" I didn't, though, get the impression that solving the problem was really in their gift. If it had happened I could have accepted it as part of "*an intellectual game,*" a game with a purpose, which I referred to earlier.

I was now more conscious than ever before that teaching isn't about instruction so much as discussion leading to understanding (Elliott, 1998:10). I would have loved it, if part of that discussion involved the students' imagination as well as their understanding. Mathematics, no less than science and other school subjects is not, for me, about technical knowing so much as a vehicle by which students gain an understanding of their culture - and add to it. MacDonald and Walker's (1976:909) view of science (they were arguing about the Nuffield Science scheme) is one I find helpful when they say that it:

*can be seen as one stage of a continuing debate in which the tension lies between a view of science as a source of technical knowledge, and a view of science as a contribution to culture .... between science as information and techniques to be learnt, and science as knowledge to be gained by the extension of imagination and understanding.*

At some point in the subsequent school year (1994-95), John had shown me another video of a chemistry 'practical'. I think it was to do with titrations, which is to do with ascertaining "*the amount of a constituent in (a solution) by measuring the volume of a known concentration of reagent required to complete a reaction with it, often using an indicator.*"

Because I hadn't taken any notes at the time about my reaction to the video, I can only comment on what remained in my memory from that time. I watched students on the video setting up their experiments. I 'knew' that they had discussed beforehand the technical 'know how' involved in the setting up of the experiments.

That was clear from what I was seeing. So they had 'information' and 'techniques'. What wasn't so clear to me was why they were doing what they were doing. What was it that gripped their imaginations, leading to increased understanding, that they would want to talk to all and sundry about? Whatever it was, I couldn't see evidence of it on the video. Though they were moving about 'purposefully', I had a strange feeling that they were actually passive and incurious. I remember distinctly telling John that. For seconds there was no answer. And then he told me: "*I am shocked!*" He was shocked at what I told him, but maybe more at the stark way I had said it without preamble. He was staying with me in Bath at the time. Later that same evening as I was preparing a meal for us both I had a very strong intuition which I needed to share with John as it concerned him. Here is what I said:

*I am now convinced beyond all doubt that whatever fears inhabited you are draining away. You're going to have little difficulty doing the Ph.D. or indeed, changing anything you want to change in your classrooms.*

His reply didn't surprise me:

*You are right. That's what I now believe, too.*

I felt greatly relieved. Whatever tension may have existed over those few hours evaporated. It was at that moment, I believe, though I wouldn't have been able to explain it rationally, that our greatest point of equality was reached.

In returning to the video though, I acknowledge that it is only, as John said, a snapshot in time and it couldn't possibly represent the myriad of 'understandings' that students would have. Although he added: "*it can be helpful, I suppose, really.*" While John's answer was true, he may also have been a little on the defensive. If he could have left it open, would he have learnt more? He may have, but again this was his choice. He had a right to be open or not. For myself, I would have liked to have seen the students on both videos questioning the meaning of what they were doing; taking a stance, a stance that

involved incessant questioning.

I agree with MacDonald and Walker's (1976:93) view that true science teaching consist of *"habituating the pupil to observe for himself, to reason for himself on what he observes, and to check the conclusions at which he arrives by further observation and experiment."* So I wanted what I was observing on both videos to be more about the students discovering than just being required to acquire inert information. A.N. Whitehead (1961:13) rightly, in my view, maintained that *"inert ideas"* deadened the process of teaching and learning for students and teachers alike. Perhaps John's students did need to have their curiosity incited a little more, become more excited, become more involved in a cycle of question and answer. In that kind of process I believe they would have come up with more of their own meanings. I suppose I wanted their knowledge to live in ways which, as Stenhouse (1983:183) puts it, are *"sceptical, provisional, speculative ...."* and that perhaps would have moved them more speedily on to their next exciting discovery. Perhaps discovery was going on, but if so, it wasn't evident to me.

In fairness to John he accepted prompting from me the previous year to consider his *"students as consultants"* to him and to his classroom 'projects'. He also said that:

*I value what they say and, if they suggest something I will act on it. And I suppose it would be the value of democracy there. But it's not just democracy, it's really listening to them, really listening to what's coming from their worlds and to, in some way, encourage them to realise that they can help shape their own world.*

Like Sayer (In Elliott, 1998: 48), I have no hesitation in saying that John's efforts were contributing to an education for *"autonomy, democratic decision-making, releasing potential, giving opportunities for initiative ...."* In fact he himself said as much on 3rd March, 1995, on audiotape:

*it's worthwhile having profound respect for people .... building community by having quality communication .... Within any institution I think we can become dehumanised by routine, and*

*it's partly breaking out of routine to make it more human.*

On the same tape John was appreciative also of my efforts to help him when he said:

*I think I have experienced liberation, I have experienced more excitement in my teaching and bringing myself more alive in my work .... I find action research is actually coming to meet me where I am.*

He added too that:

*I'm very glad to have met you. I think that's a great strength for me. I think if you weren't there I don't really know if I'd be motivated enough. Thanks very much, Ben.*

### My role changes

For more than a year I had been trying to persuade John to seek Ph.D. accreditation at the University of Bath. In fact he began to contact Jack Whitehead at the University of Bath from March 1995 onwards and finally he decided he was to visit on 26th May, 1995. I felt my task was now completed. It was good at this particular 'ending', John felt, that *"our educative relationship - I feel there is a growing bond of trust - has helped and is helping me to understand/improve my practice"* (12th February, 1995). And that our educative relationship *"may be,"* according to John, *"becoming more collaborative."*

The nature of John's research was changing too. Jack Whitehead suggested that one of John's questions might focus *"on helping your pupils to improve the quality of their learning."* For me, that was a welcome movement away from John's concentration on improving his own *"teaching behaviour(s)."*

### A metamorphosis for me

I feel I had a responsibility to enable John to improve his practice as

a teacher, but felt another obligation as well. Sloughing off his fears was, I felt, a key to John's greater growth in independence and to establishing greater equality between us. I felt I could best discharge this responsibility by taking responsibility for my own participation in my educative relationship with John, but not for his participation. What John would or would not do was his responsibility. I am raising my understanding of 'participation' briefly here because I think there are implications about how I use 'power' in my educative relationships with others. My reflection on my initial reaction to Zoe's comments on 'power relations' and the 'hierarchical layers' represented in my relationships in chapter 2 brought the issue of power in my educative relationships with others more overtly to my attention in this chapter.

Let me say of power that it "*is intrinsically guiltless*" (Friedman, 1976: 44). It is the "*will to power*", the greed for more power that is destructive (ibid, p. 45). There is no need for me to renounce power. In fact, I need power to help others to move forward in improving what they are doing. Power is part of the energy that impels me to help others. I do need, however, to be responsible in my exercise of power because otherwise my use of it would become destructive. In my educative relationships with others, I am constantly faced with power issues when, for example, I am trying to demarcate my rights from the rights of others. Can I make these demarcations according to 'rules' which will be valid once and for all? I believe not. I believe that I have to act minute-to-minute and with a continuous sense of responsibility in relationships with others. It is by taking this stance that I will find the 'rules' for such demarcation. Buber (1965: 14) referred to the minute-to-minute continuous sense of responsibility thus: "*I know no fullness but each mortal hour's fullness of .... responsibility.*"

In any case I felt a need, regarding John, to find ways of dealing with the presence of fear within him and within me too. Here was an opportunity for John to revisit his 'wound' that would, I felt, lead to his becoming more free and perhaps more effective too as a teacher! It was with that sense of purpose, supported by my sense of care,



that I decided to enable John to revisit his fear to see how much of it had been excised and how far he still had to go. I was, I believe, dialectically opposing my sense of care with feeling a need to be contestatory. I was being contestatory in holding to my view that what I had shown John was my view of our educative relationship in which he had revealed his fears to me over time. I felt my friendship for John was one that morally obliged me to try and help him in some way to alleviate those fears. In a paper I presented to the BERA Conference (York University, September, 1997), I wrote with some passion about what I felt was part of my moral responsibility in my educative relationships:

*My experience is that people .... have 'psychic' needs, that more than one person I meet is 'weak, wounded or frail' (like myself). What do I mean? I am meaning that their their minds and their spirits are affected by what they have undergone or are undergoing. And my question is, what can I do about it? Can I pass by on the other side? No .... I help in these areas because I believe I have a gift for doing so. Is this unwarranted pride? No, I believe it is humility really, the humility that tells me I know who I am, that I have the insight to see myself in my true position in relation to my responsibility and to my concern for others. My spontaneous elevation of my feelings and of my instinct over my reason and 'ethical' rules is my personal answer to the educational difficulties which confront some of the people I meet.*

*How could I both challenge and be compassionate?*

My concern was how could I both challenge and, at the same time, offer compassionate understanding? Would I be willing to challenge even if my challenge evoked shock? And why would I wish to evoke shock? Was that educational? If, in challenging, I evoked shock what, if anything, legitimated challenging and offering shock? All these questions are arising for me in hindsight. I didn't obviously know beforehand how I would challenge. I wasn't even sure why I would challenge. In the event, I did challenge, sometimes very strongly and, at one time, to the point of shock! In doing that, had I any realisation of how that would affect John? Did I know him sufficiently and did he know me sufficiently so that what I would say to him on any occasion could be accepted with at least a degree of

equanimity? And, how can I 'know' another sufficiently so as to be able to gauge the effects of what I'm going to say? And how do I know myself sufficiently so that I have a prior intuition of how I'm going to affect another? In challenging John's view of education I also intended tackling the issue of fear - both within John and myself!

### *Dealing with fear*

I am going to explain what I mean by fear, but before doing so, I need to say that I intuited that John possessed fear, at least some fear. I possess it too and I believe it was this latter fact that enabled me to recognise it in him. Was there any evidence that I was right? John's own words in his writings offer some evidence that my intuition was correct. At each moment of challenge I knew that I was dealing with a person who had told me quite an amount about himself and about his fears, as I had too, about myself and my fears. For example, John had told me in connection with his School Study Hall role that he used to feel "*quite stressful*"; "*under pressure*"; "*a lot depends on your own tiredness and mood and so on*"; that he needed to learn to "*cope*." I believe these are all symptoms of fear, but a fear that I believe can be minimised. I believe that John's engagement in various research projects brought him nearer to his students than he had ever been before. This effort at stronger connection with his students would, I believe, minimise his fear. I believe, too, that my effort at challenging him was also helpful in minimising it. It would only do so I believe because he trusted me. I know he trusted me because he kept coming to see me, he kept writing to me, he kept telephoning me.

Regarding the fear in John's life and in respect of my openness, he said to me on one occasion that he was challenged by it but that he was "*a little frightened by it also*." He added that: "*I am wary of being too open myself in case I get hurt*." Regarding his desire to again contemplate studying for his doctorate, he said (15th April, 1994): "*I must say I am enthused and quite excited at the whole venture. I would like to have the confidence / courage to pursue the University of Bath angle (i.e. the doctorate)*." So I wondered how I could work with John

so that I would enable him to replace whatever fears he had with "confidence/courage?" This was to be an ongoing question to which my enquiry and this representation of it was at least a partial answer. And I kept in mind occasions when he told me, for instance, that *"I am afraid of talking too deeply too soon"; "that he didn't 'want to be overloaded'"; that: "Often times I pressurise myself."* My efforts to persuade him again to think about taking up a doctorate *"both disturbs and attracts me,"* he said. In my educative relationship then I was walking with a man who was, not only very caring and compassionate himself, but was also very sensitive - and sometimes fearful, or was it feeling apprehensive? (I will explore fear below). I would have to find a way of being companionable and compassionate myself so that what I said and did would enable John to feel at ease while also challenging him to move forward in his life and in his education of his students.

Regarding John's fear, I wondered how I might enable him to deal with it, or at least to allay it. Certainly one way forward was my constant iteration to John about his capacity to obtain his doctorate. I fully believed that he would obtain it. If he registered at a university for it I would take that as the first sign that he was beginning to master his fears. Practically all of my efforts in this direction took place in conversations on the telephone which I hadn't logged.

### *I need to know what fear is*

But what do I mean by fear? Dictionaries regularly call fear *"an unpleasant emotion"* caused by exposure to danger, expectation of pain, a state of alarm. Is it different from anxiety? I'm not sure about that when I consider that dictionaries regularly define it as *"concern about an imminent danger, a nervous disorder caused by excessive uneasiness."* Whether I call it fear or anxiety, I knew when I heard *"certain descriptions"* from John, that there was at least uneasiness, an emotional feeling of unpleasantness perhaps, a feeling that he was alarmed at something. Perhaps that is as far as I can go

regarding a 'definition' of fear.

Phillips (1995: 53-57) says that if I tell him what I fear he will tell me what has happened to me! There may be some truth in his contention. But his contention is not my concern here. Yet I have no intention of refusing to deal with the issue of fear in John's life. I feel that my friendship with him is one that morally obliges me to try and help him in some way to alleviate those fears. For Sartre (1975, in Phillips, 1995: 57), the person who is fearful is one who is unavoidably confronted with a capacity to make choices. That perhaps fear signifies that there is something of ultimate value to our lives that frightens us. That fear is really refusal of the self-knowledge that tells us that our future is unknowable and to 'know' we must risk! I can therefore use fear as an obstacle or as an opportunity. So either I confront myself with naming my fear, or maybe somebody else does it for me. In any case doing so or having it done for me, is for Sartre, the route to authenticity.

To enable John to begin shedding at least some of his fear I reached out to him, connected with him! I believe he endorsed this when he said:

*You certainly encourage me 'to speak with my own voice' and also to tease out what is my own 'voice.' I am excited by this .... Last year (academic year) I remember getting a real lift when hearing from you that what teachers have to say is of value, in particular, that what I have to say is of value.*

And again he said:

*Regarding action research I consider you my mentor .... regarding what I write up in June (1995) and the possibility of contact with Jack Whitehead I will need your assistance as a critical friend and mentor.*

And just one more quotation for my present purposes: "You have been a great help, you know .... encouraging me to be more confident in what I'm doing." Our conversations on the telephone, unrecorded, echoed these sentiments. Besides connecting with others and with John himself, of course, I was also connecting with myself interiorly.

Now to my decision to challenge John. What was the aim of my decision to challenge? It was to attempt to enable John to shake himself free from his fears, fears which could possibly disable him in time. And when I challenged him strongly about his students appearing to be passive, to being incurious when they were doing chemistry titration experiments, my challenge was certainly a plea for the students to be more involved. But it was also my plea to John himself to shake himself loose from his fears. My challenge and my plea was purely intuitive and was my immediate understanding of a 'truth' without any apparent reasoning on my part. I cannot 'prove' my intuition was genuine. I can only point to my later second intervention on the same day as evidence that in accepting my challenge, John could begin to shake off some of his fears. He didn't need to do something about my perception of his students as being passive recipients of inert knowledge. He needed only to acknowledge to himself that he was much stronger than he originally perceived himself to be. He eventually agreed: *"You are right. That's what I now believe, too."*

That was one of the 'peak' experiences' that happened for me in this educative relationship. It was precious. It was the moment above others where I felt that our relationship had moved into a different gear, where greater equality was established. It was also the moment where I believe John also 'knew' with great clarity his own power and, with it, the richer meaning of his independence. Can I offer deeper quality evidence in support of these contentions? No, I can't. However, John's growing confidence enabled him to register at the University of Bath. His fears were beginning to be shed. He was beginning again to dream the 'impossible'.

### *Dealing with criticism*

There are two other areas I want to deal with. One is to do with what I have learnt from my educative relationship with John and, specifically, how I relate to God and how my learning was brought

forward by that relationship. I aim to deal with these two areas together as I believe my own relationships with others always includes my relationship with God. As I did in chapter 2 concerning Valerie's' reluctance about conversing about her religious beliefs, I am now preparing to enter into an interior monologue, or intrapersonal dialogue about my explanation of the nature of my belief in my God. But, first, let me tell my reader about how a previous alternative draft of my explanation of my relationship with God was received by my critical friends.

At an action research validation meeting held on 12th May, 1999, Peter, Jack and 'John', as readers, articulated their difficulties with my representation of my God. Peter had written to me some time before the meeting and said that my draft chapter, "*sounded like a one-sided conversation, or one side of a conversation with an absent/unheard psychotherapist.*" At the meeting itself, Peter said that his view of the God of Verdi's *Dies Irae* was of a "*stern and uncompromising God*" an unacceptable God who attempted to coerce people into 'good behaviour' with the threat of eternal punishment.

Jack, referring to my relationships with others, said of me that "*I had never imposed my views on them*"; in the quality of my relationships with others I had, he said, "*avoided the use of the word 'God'*", though he knew, he said, "*how important his God is to him.*" Yet, unaccountably, I had imposed my views on the reader in this particular draft of my chapter. John referred to his preference for minimising the use of "*God-language.*" The reaction of everybody to the chapter wasn't, however, similar. On reading my thesis, including this particular chapter, in March 1999, Joanna, a university lecturer, said of my thesis, that it was:

*an exhilarating and simultaneously draining experience ....  
Wonderful, exhilarating, distressing, demanding and deeply  
moving. What a powerful writer you are. The honesty and  
integrity of the writing and the rigour of the search makes terms  
of validity and reliability pale into insignificance.*

She added that: "*I was very nervous, being atheist, when first asked to read the Ph.D. But I needn't have been.*" She emphasised that my

inclusion of my God *"was .... not significant."* What was significant, she felt, was: *"your integrity in searching for your meaning; that was a moving and expressive experience in a piece of writing."*

Nevertheless, I knew I had to address what Jack called my *"adherence to hierarchical forms"* of language when trying to represent my relationship with God to my readers. I had to address also what Peter called *"the most appropriate ear for the reader to bring to the text."* So in attempting to answer Peter's question I am now inviting my reader to listen with an ear attuned to the notion of *"difference,"* difference for them and difference for me.

In what I have written about my relationship with my God below, I feel I have been trying to exercise or incite the reader's imagination (O'Donoghue, 1998: 56); specifically, the ability to imagine being different, in questions of the kind,

*What must it be to be different, to have a life different from my own? What is it to be myself and not someone else? Can I imagine being someone else? Is my imagining valid or merely a form of self-deception?*

I feel that I have constructed from my past experiences, and my very recent experiences and practice, an authentic voice that speaks to my reader about a topic about which the reader may not be familiar, or about which they may have objections or, some reservations at least. But I have done more than that. I feel I have finally been able to construct an explanation of my God-belief which, while empathising with my critical friends has, paradoxically, also the potentiality to evoke the reader's empathy for me. Because of the sincerity and integrity with which I have written it, based on my experiences and practice, I hope the reader will be able to lay aside whatever reservations they may have about me, while retaining the right to preserve legitimate reservations about the topic of God-belief which I have been discussing.

*My own relationships with others includes my relationship with God*

Regarding the link between my relationship with God and with John, I want to say that John showed me at least one way in which I could honour and respect him and also get in touch with my own 'inwardness'. This happened often when he came to see me at the college. On these occasions he used ask me to delay our conversation for some minutes while he went to a chapel to, 'quieten' himself, as he used to put it and to get in touch with himself inwardly and with the God he so strongly believed in. These were moments in which I began to understand more deeply the meaning of "*lifting up my mind and heart to God*," which is the meaning of prayer for Christians. For me it became part of the preparation that always enriched our subsequent conversations. And now I want to respond to John's prompting in order to say what my 'living' relationship with God is like. But just before I do so, I also want to say that though I needed to respond to John, this enquiry, like all my other enquiries in this thesis, are really about me. They are about how I practise the values that I say I hold - love and freedom, authenticity and integrity - and to what extent I practise them. I have found it difficult to say this because I have to hold myself accountable to others through publicly admitting that all my enquiries are about me; that they are about what I believe, think, intuit, feel and the values I practise. However, the starkness of my aloneness is lessened for me by knowing that my personal 'I' isn't alone. For me, I am accompanied by a personal God whom I am gradually getting to know with new eyes and in new ways.

In enunciating my values and trying to actualise them in my practice I am trying to help others to change and improve something in their individual practices. In so doing I believe I am also improving and changing myself. I am searching for my 'self' and for my 'identity' or perhaps I am creating them on a continuous basis. Like Merton (Morea, 1997:63-92), I believe that my search for, or creation of, my self and of my identity is inseparable from my search for God. In finding other people I also find my self and my God. In finding God I also find other people - and my self. Humanistic psychologists, like Maslow and Rogers, agree with Merton (ibid) that human beings are never satisfied. They are in a state of dissatisfaction because they



have not yet become self-actualised. For them, self-actualisation is found in the natural order of biology and society. For Merton as for me, I do not find my self-actualisation in the natural order exclusively. I fully discover it only in the God I believe in.

In my relationships with others I endeavour to enable them to improve or change something and hope that in the process, they will discover a greater sense of their self and identity. I discover some of mine by the same means but believe I discover it most significantly in God. In searching for my self then, I am also searching for God. As with Merton (ibid), I believe that in attempting to find my self in God I have to experience the void within me. That sounds rather unpleasant but really it means to me, an unfulfilled longing which nothing in the world will satisfy. And death is there to remind me of the world's incapacity to fulfil it. I have to abandon any idea that my void will be satisfied with anything in my immediate experience. So I have to search for God and for my self in God. Only that will fill the void within me. Even though I am very much at home with others I believe that I will only find my permanent home with God.

The void not only signals that I have unfulfilled longings, it also means that I live with the awareness of my death, of guilt, of pain and of the fragility of my human life. I live with anxiety, with a sense of alienation, of a freedom of which I am sometimes afraid. I accept that if I didn't believe in and have a relationship with my God, my life would be diminished, perhaps even be meaningless. My spiritual mentor, Thomas Merton (chapter 6) started from that perspective of human experience. The 'void' that the existentialists and Merton talk about is, for me, somewhat akin to the 'between' of Buber. It offers me a space within which I can continually recreate myself as I participate in friendship with God and others. The void signals not only that I have unfulfilled longings that nothing but God can fill, it also acts as a space within which I can move towards fulfilling these longings to some extent with God and others.

I need to ask myself, though, if I am using my belief in God as my mechanism for avoiding or evading the difficulties of life, for avoiding

my experience of the void, for example? Or at least, for lessening its intensity? One way or the other I am not sure I can steer clear of this void. I believe it resides, even if only very temporarily, for example, in my occasional feeling of depression. Experiencing the void is, I believe, an unavoidable part of my journey towards knowing God. Apart from depression, I believe it also appears at other times in my relationship with others. For example, when I took risks with John in terms of challenging him, once to the possible point of rupture of relationship, there were a few hours when I experienced this void. I was temporarily unconnected waiting for John to decide if he could believe in and trust me! The intensity of the void was lifted when he made his decision that, yes, he could trust me! Regarding my belief that his fears were draining away he had said: *"You are right. That's what I now believe, too."*

Another question I have sometimes asked myself - and rejected - is this: does my educative relationship with John, for example, help me to fulfil myself, to become self-actualised? I do not think it is helpful for me to think of it this way. I don't want anybody, John included, to be the means to my self-actualisation. If relationships were the path to my self-actualisation, couldn't I with equanimity walk out on them when I became convinced that they were not fulfilling me or helping my self-actualisation? Perhaps the best form of self-actualisation for me is one where I try to avoid being too self-regarding. Maybe what I need is self-emptying. What do I mean by that? For me it means that I practise attempting to detach myself from myself when I enter into dialogue with others. It is a form of self-control that I attempt to practise so that I may be more 'present' to others in dialogue. I believe that it is in my effort to be 'present' in the minute-to-minute flow of dialogue with others that I will achieve the self-actualisation I am seeking.

Having described and explained my relationship with God perhaps too technically and theoretically, I want to say what it feels like to me as I enjoy both solitude and relationships with others. My God is like an old shoe. Yes, an old shoe. His fit with me and mine with him feels comfortable. Mind you, it isn't as if He won't occasionally do

what I did to John - challenge. And challenge mightily! There have been times over the past few years when I was dying to say: "*Hump off, you're getting above your station!*" Why did I feel that way? That was when He belonged to a Church! Over the past few years, however, all my lifelong concepts of Him began to disappear one after the other. One was fear, fear of him. That disappeared. I tested it. I had closely associated the God I believed in with my Church, the Catholic Church. I decided over the past few years that He had a right to a life dissociated from the 'club' - from the Church! I mentally removed Him from the 'club'. The minute I did it I felt He became more chummy, more relaxed, more Himself. All His previous outdated duties and obligations lifted from Him. We could now talk man to man with no holds barred! I felt He was more free to exercise His responsibility of an 'I-Thou' relationship towards me individually. The previous Church 'rules' bounding it had disappeared for Him and for me. That was very welcome! Of course, He could return to His church now that the shackles had been lifted. He could return in freedom. So could I.

Apart from fear I had some worries about how I was going to keep in contact with my God - the problem of communication. Up to this I had been used to saying 'prayers', principally what is called the 'Divine Office'. It was mostly made up of the psalms from the Old Testament with some readings from the New. I dropped it with some little trepidation. After all I was a member too of the 'club'. Wouldn't I feel some tremor of fear at dropping 'obligations'? Fear of God? No, I didn't. That's not to say that I wouldn't again take it up in the future because of the desire of a community to which I might belong. But for now, I won't. I want to continue on a journey that seeks to make everything new, to see things with new eyes. Doing things differently and then maybe I'll see things differently.

However, one problem with dropping traditional 'prayers' is that I need a new way to communicate, don't I? Then I realised that I often forget people, even those I have known and liked for many years, those who are my close friends. Does that mean carelessness, neglect? I don't think so. All it means is that I am human and

therefore limited. I haven't got the gift of keeping an almost infinite number of ideas and people in mind simultaneously. The most I can do is remember some of them from time to time. That's the best I can do. When I remember them I ring, write or e-mail. But what of God? Did He, and does He, get the same treatment? He does. With the exception that I don't normally write, ring or e mail Him. No, I remember Him mentally. And what are some of the things that help to remind me of Him? There was John's desire before meeting me that he have some 'quiet' time where he either sat in chapel silent in thought and word or "*raised his mind and heart to God.*" That was a reminder to me of God's availability to me, but also of mine to him. Music does it too - frequently. But I also lay aside some time most days to be silent in His presence.

And I don't forget either that I am in communication with my God when I am attempting to live out my living belief in Him with others in relationship.

#### *Pushing a little against different points of view*

Let me now explain what dialectics means to me and how I feel it helps me in my relationship with my God. I like McNiff's (1988:41) view of dialectics. For her, and for me too, it consists of question and answer and the logic of questions and answers is called dialectical logic. But what really enthuses me about it is that in dialectics I put the focus on change which helps me, not to change anything out of all recognition, but to push a little against different points of view, including my own. Putting the emphasis on dialectics then enables me to bring about a metamorphosis, a change of form, in my thinking, while still remaining the same person. I like that.

And so with God. I'd like to be in mystical communication with Him, to have ecstatic moments of union with Him. At one time I thought that I could only achieve that in solitude, eyeball to eyeball with Him. Now I'm satisfied (and in this dialectics helps me) to occasionally have that person-to-person contact with God, but to

realise I can also occasionally have it in joyous community with others. I believe I had it with John in that memorable moment when, having challenged him about my perception of his students' lack of curiosity, he some time later responded with knowing that his fears, if not altogether gone, were nevertheless draining away. I believe that it was in that concrete moment that I not only met a new John, a metamorphosed John, but also a metamorphosed God. I had met a God who is as involved in the world as I am and who delights in it. In meeting John at a level of total respect, albeit involving strong challenge, I believe I met a God I recognised more clearly. I believe with Buber that: *"Every Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou"* (Bacik, 1992:220).

I know I never meet God directly but I can and do meet Him in the *"apparently empty spaces between persons"* (Bacik, 1992:233). I met him that day in the space between John and me, in the void of anxious waiting before John's answer. Buber describes this meeting in the spaces as 'The extended lines of relations' which 'meet in the eternal Thou' (ibid). And so each time I talked to John I created what Buber called the 'between', which is a sphere in the interaction between us which is common to both of us, which transcends what properly belongs to each of us.

I accept Buber's idea that I didn't fully find the genuine personal meaning of John's life within him, nor within both of us as a community, but only in Buber's 'inter human', which is what bound both of us together and made communication between us possible. But that word 'inter human' is loaded, is hugely complex. It includes initial attraction between us; responsibility of one for the other; trust or lack of it, and so on. According to Buber, too, it is in this 'between' that my and John's spiritual life is located. It is not what happens within me as an individual or within John as an individual that is crucial but what happens in the 'inter human' or the 'between'. And so I don't think of individuals, including myself, existing as super people with no need ever for recourse to one another. I need always to address others, friends and enemies, and perhaps enemies most of all. From understanding my enemies I will

most understand and improve myself as a person. But why do I like Buber's emphasis on the 'between', on the 'inter human'? For me it seems to create the space that respects the uniqueness of the other. There is always the danger that I only see the other as an extension of myself. If I think I see God in the other there is the danger that I may actually be seeing sameness, that is, myself. However, by thinking of the 'between', and of the space between the other and myself, it may offer the other a necessary distance from me and vice versa. Then a choice can more easily be made about establishing or not establishing relationship. I believe I learnt the necessity of that kind of freedom from my experience with Valerie in the previous chapter (chapter 1).

I believe as a human being, however, that I really only come to full existence in relationship. Without John then, there wouldn't be a fully formed I. I could have kept myself at a 'professional distance' from John but instead I reached out to him in genuineness. He reciprocated. In doing so, we established genuine mutuality. Our part of what Buber calls the 'life of dialogue' enabled us I believe to eventually participate with one another and John with his students, with passion and also with reverence. I believe we were able to do so because of the 'divine sparks' engendered by our meeting in the 'between' where God was also a partner with us.

Regarding my love of God, I know it is not merely about my enjoyment of a moment of private ecstasy, such as I sometimes have when enjoying a piece of music or enjoying a 'peak' experience, such as with John. No, my love is based on *"the responsibility of an I for a Thou"* (Bacik, 1992:233), my taking of responsibility in my relationship with God and with John. I do not mistake my feelings of warmth towards my God and towards John for the full reality. No, my love is also my personal responsibility to every 'You' (meaning other persons) I meet as well as to my 'Thou' (meaning my God); it needs to endure the test of time, difficulty and challenge. It involves my understanding, perhaps for the first time, of *"what it means to be a human being"* (Bacik, 1992: 233).

## I tell John

I shared what I had written in this paper with John in late April, 1998, to which he replied, saying,

*Apart from my existential 'misgivings,' Ben, this is some of the best writing I have read by you regarding clarity of thought, flow of language, and articulated meanings .... It took a long time (seven days!) to net that compliment from this 'deep sea'; I hope it was worth waiting for!! .... the representation is definitely yours Ben, even with its possibility of causing me pain in opening a wound that is healing regarding fear and in the authoring of John by somebody (no matter how caring!) other than (me)! And you are caring towards others and towards me!*

As well as John's comments above, I have received other comments from him in the intervening year. For example, John wondered about some of my judgments. Fear did exist within him but maybe I had, as he said, *"partly misunderstood it .... sometimes over-stressed it."* *"How do you know there aren't elements of projection regarding your understanding of John's fears?"* he asked. *"Maybe, I was,"* John said, *"occasionally 'theorising' John into a weaker, less knowledgeable position than John, in fact, occupied."* He, furthermore, asked me: *"How does this relate to your central concern for love / care and freedom?"*

I acknowledge John's pain as he felt a wound re-opening for him on reading my chapter. I too felt fear and pain within myself as I waited for John's first reply (April, 1998), fearing for the second time the possibility of rupture in our relationship. I was unable to write, to read with attention, or even sleep properly. *"How is what I have written going to affect John?"* was my constant thought during those seven days.

Regarding John's later concerns, I may, of course, have 'misunderstood' his fears, may have 'over-stressed' them. John didn't, however, tell me in what particular way I had 'misunderstood' or 'over-stressed' his fears. What happened, I think, is that in concentrating on the issue of fear and my desire to help alleviate it, I didn't portray John's educational life in its totality. My portrayal of

John's educational life is obviously partial. I couldn't do otherwise. I wasn't writing a biography of John's personal or professional life. Rather, I was trying to describe and explain my own educational development as I was in an educative relationship with John. My emphasis is on how I am improving what I am doing. For me, improving what I am doing includes responding to articulated needs within the other with whom I am in an educative relationship. John often articulated his fears to me and I responded with careful listening. That is what I believe I have done. Because John is naturally concerned about how he appears in my text, he wishes that his own interpretation of his own life and educational action should be the ones to be represented. I understand this concern of his. However, I also understand that he is writing his own thesis in which he will present his own portrayal of his educational development in the way that he feels best represents himself from his own point of view.

I also have to ask myself, however, John's last, but one, question: Was I *"occasionally 'theorising' John into a weaker, less knowledgeable position than John, in fact, occupied"*? He also said that he felt that I *"sometimes privilege Ben's position over John's."* I accept John's perception of how he feels I portrayed him. That, however, is not my perception of my own actions. I wanted to offer a caring presence, a presence that was available to listen not only to what I was hearing, but to what I perceived may also have been going on inside John. But I also felt, professionally, that I needed to challenge him where I felt challenge was warranted. I wondered also, though, throughout my professional relationship with John if his capacity to tolerate uncertainty was large enough to see that there might be some 'truth' in what I had been trying to bring to his attention. And yet, I also understood John's reactions to the inevitable pain and discomfort my challenges caused him. Dadds (1993b: 298) refers to the type of vulnerability John experienced below:

*Most normal human beings are driven by curiosity, by the need to develop new understandings of their world, by the search for new insights. yet this search, or quest, involves journeys into strange and unpredictable territory; territory in which we may be vulnerable and open to risk, pain, discomfort. We may certainly*



*not feel 'safe'. This lack of safety can evoke a contradictory drive - the drive to protect ourselves from the exposure. If we do not feel safe, we are more likely to stay, or retreat, behind our defences, and, thus, hinder the potential for learning.*

Dadds (1990, in 1993b: 298) also feels there is a need to create learning climates which combine "*psychological safety whilst also providing the necessary challenge that is essential for learning.*" Because of my training and practise as a counsellor I felt I could provide the requisite 'safety' for John, but could only take responsibility for my own participation and not for his (see my Introduction, p. 1). Obviously, I must have provided some measure of 'safety', because John continued ringing and writing to me even during the periods of my most acute challenges to him. The topics of our telephone conversations were very rarely to do with how he might improve something in his classroom, rather, they were to do with his articulation of his fears. I could have ignored them, but didn't. As I said earlier above:

*My experience is that people .... have 'psychic' needs .... And my question is, what can I do about it? Can I pass by on the other side? No .... I help in these areas because I believe I have a gift for doing so.*

In some way John must have acknowledged my openness to lend a willing ear to his articulation of his fears and, furthermore, he availed of it. I am openly acknowledging, too, that I believe I have a gift for listening with empathy and that John knew this was true. Was I projecting my own feelings on to him though, as John felt I was doing? According to Freud (in Bischof, 1970: 55), projection is to do with

*protecting one's own ego from feelings of guilt by casting them toward another individual and unwittingly blaming him for the very faults that one has himself. We project our anxiety-producing thoughts onto someone else, thereby not having to defend our own thoughts.*

I may have been projecting my own fears on to John in that I possess fears, often irrational ones. I am aware of them, have never pretended that this isn't the case. I live with them. I hope that one day - indeed

every day - they will become less strong, less real for me. Yet, I also believe that I am able to live with them. They are useful, too, in that they help me to empathise with others. Was I trying to throw my fears on to John? I can't answer that authoritatively. I can say, however, that I clearly heard John articulating his fears on many occasions. I felt his fears interiorly because of my own indwelling with my own fears. And because I have felt committed for a long time to helping to alleviate stress in others, no matter how minuscule, I do so. As I said above, I also believe that *"I have a gift for doing so."* And because I am able to do so, I must do so. That is my moral imperative.

In chapter 2 I referred to Collins's (1992: 154) emphasis on *fellow feeling* which is not unlike Freud's 'projection', but is also more than that. My own experiences can often be similar in some way to those of the person I am with in an educative situation. With Marion in chapter 2, it was to do with *"voicelessness."* I had experienced that in my youth, so had she. It helped me to feel a strong empathy with her desire to ensure that her pupils, in turn, would never be voiceless. Belatedly, I recognised that I needed to heed Zoe's voice too (in chapter 2). Similarly with John, because I knew he possessed fears - he told me about them - I became determined to help him to alleviate them. I possessed fears, too, and, therefore, had a fellow feeling with him.

Lomax (1998: 33), referring to her reading of this chapter, feels that I am willing, *"to 'sacrifice' (my) relations with John for John's own good."* Below is how Lomax puts it:

*It strikes me that Ben's relation with John and his willingness to sacrifice for him, is completely opposite to a relation that threatens to appropriate, colonise or alienate. Yet, fear of 'being colonised', for me, is the other side of the coin to 'being connected'. I am uncomfortable with the idea of 'connection'. Ben leads me to question this view. He found that his fear of being unconnected was not realised when it happened, because he found a spiritual strength in acting out his values - a connection with God.*

I'd like to think that I am willing to sacrifice for another, but I'm not sure that I'd be able *"to 'sacrifice' my relation with John for John's own*

good." I wasn't consciously aware at the time that I might even have been doing that. Though I was aware of the possibility of rupture in the relationship, almost simultaneously, I was aware that it was unlikely to happen. My intuition told me that the bond of my friendship with John was too great for it to be easily sundered. Nevertheless, I accept that there was no certainty that it wouldn't happen. And certainly I never had an intention "*to appropriate, colonise or alienate.*" My main intention was to exercise what Powell (1989: 60) calls: "*kindness, encouragement and challenge.*" By kindness, I mean: "*I am for you, I am on your side.*" When John was sure that I was on his side, so the speak, then I was able to encourage him to believe in himself. I was able to challenge him to put his goodness and giftedness to work even more than he had done. If loving is an art, as Fromm says it is (1957), I tried artfully to know when it was time for 'being on his side', when encouragement was needed, and when John was ready to be challenged.

There was also the *wounded wonder* element that Collins (ibid) speaks about. The 'wonder' part of this phrase requires me to go beyond appearances in order to recognise with approval John's unique value as a person. Rather than experiencing this empirically, I know it interiorly. That is my knowing in this case. I had a heart-felt sense of wonder in the presence of John. That was sufficient motivation for me to want to help him in some way. It constituted how I construed the meaning of questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" For me, it constituted the care I felt obligated to show John.

But I am still left with a thought, or is it a question about my relationship with John? Perhaps I should have challenged him earlier about the fears he articulated with me? Perhaps I could have done so gradually over a period of time so that the impact wouldn't have been so great? Perhaps reserving for too long a challenge that actually shocked John wasn't a good idea? However, what I did at the time was what I thought was most appropriate for him. I was aware there could have been fallout but because we were going to have a leisurely meal around the time of one of the challenges I felt there would be

plenty of time to deal with any fallout that might happen.

Ultimately, what most concerned me was this. How did John understand and accept himself? In his attempts to understand and accept himself did he ever accept challenges other than ones he imposed on himself? I wasn't sure he did. Certainly, he never answered my challenges in a way that I feel could have opened him up to being even more creative than he was. It wasn't that my challenges were, perhaps, the best ones I could have offered John. No, it's just that he never showed any inclination to answer them in a way that wasn't defensive. I now believe that he missed an opportunity by not being more open to challenge. By not being more open to challenge he may have missed the opportunity of understanding and accepting himself more. I accept Jersild's (1955: 3) view that:

*The teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help the students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance.*

And yet, I now end my explanation of my relationship with John knowing that there is a very fine balance to be drawn between my efforts at altruism in his regard and the question of my use of power. As I said earlier, I needed to exercise power as it provided the energy to enable me to help John. If I had been exercising in John's regard the "*will to power*" it would have been very destructive. Concerning my use of power I have to consider also the demarcation line between John's rights and my rights. He had a right to ignore my challenges and, in fact, that is what he did. My rights only extended to what I did - alerting him to the potential for his growth in the challenges I posed him. The rest was up to him. As I said of educative encounters in my Introduction (p. 3): "*As I come to know others I take responsibility .... for my own participation but not for theirs.*"

One of my claims to educational knowledge

In this chapter I have been addressing through my descriptions and explanations one of the distinct and original claims (Abstract) I make to educational knowledge:

*I show how my living engagement with my God is enabling me to author my life and is part of the interweaving of my values in my educative relationships with others.*

The freedom born of my struggle to find a God of my own understanding wasn't an easy one for me to achieve. It went through cycles of displaced anger which I discovered were really directed at my church and religious congregation who, in using propositional language to describe God and a liturgy that, for me, replaced Him, had masked the 'real' God from me, the God of relationship (chapter 6).

My experience of 'conflict' (chapter 5) showed me a particular bureaucracy and hierarchy which, acting on behalf of my religious congregation, attempted to prescribe, predict, order and organise the 'world' without reference to me on whose behalf it was allegedly acting. In turning away from this vision of the world, I also turned away from the vision of an unfree, prisoner-God that I felt my religious congregation was holding out to me. I came to decide that I had a right to be free and so had God. I could now begin to slough off my fears about being independent. I could now accept that I was free to choose between alternatives.

It is this new-found independence, this new-found freedom from fear, based on my new-found relationship with God, that is enabling me to author my life. It also forms part of the interweaving of my relationship with John. It is the source of my effort to influence him to become free of his own fears. Interwoven with this new-found radical call to personal freedom is a love, a care, towards others which I explained thus in section one, chapter 2:

*My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible.*

The feel of freedom, born of my struggle to find a God of my own understanding was similar to the feel of my struggle to understand my relationship with John. It was a relationship that wasn't smooth, that was full of challenge, though enduring. It was a relationship that withstood John's complaints that I misunderstood him, his complaints that I projected my fears on to him, that I 'theorised' him into a 'weaker' position than my own. John's agonising about his relationship to me shows me that coming to possess freedom is difficult, is part of a process that grows only slowly and incrementally.

But what most concerned me in my relationship with John was the extent to which I could convince him that he didn't need to hold on to his fears, that he could come to a greater understanding and acceptance of himself, as I believe I had for myself. I theorised that if John had been more open to challenge external to himself, perhaps his self-understanding and self-acceptance would have been greater. But I can't say that with certainty. And I have to acknowledge, too, that John is different to me; he has to make the final choice from among the available alternatives.

What I can now say with certainty is what John himself said of me: *"you are caring towards others and towards me!"* And what I am able to say with certainty of John is that: *"I am glad that I have had John's help in learning about my educational development."* These two sentences distil for me my idea that the educative encounter itself is educational; it enables me to accept, affirm and confirm the other in what they are doing. I am accepted, affirmed and confirmed, in turn, as I am creating my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

## **Chapter 4**

### **How do I enable 'David' to master his fears concerning discipline through offering him challenging questions that will excite his imagination towards using creative solutions?**

**Summary** I enter into an educative relationship with 'David' who is an experienced teacher of 25 years standing in a small, Irish rural, 'mixed' (boys and girls) secondary school of 270 students and 18 teachers.

David accepts my suggestion that he try to live out the values of democracy and freedom within his various classes. He continues, however, to mention his anxiety and fears concerning 'discipline'. Although I offer him challenging question, using the action research cycle (Whitehead 1995, in Russell & Korthagen: 118) as my basis, I don't believe my questions in themselves enable him to reflect. They don't enable him to consider creative alternative ways of thinking in regard to his fears about 'discipline' in the classroom.

My sharing of my leadership 'problems' with him, however, catches his 'imagination.' It apparently brings him to a new realisation about the importance of reflection. I don't then realise what I am learning: that David is apparently influenced by what is personal, emotional and imaginative.

Using my imagination, I construct a poetic interior monologue that complements, not replaces, the linear, rational, logical form of the action research cycle. In it I reflect on why I am angry that Sue is apparently being put down by Ray. I make a mental commitment to help Sue. That enables me to imagine what it is like to try and put myself in her place and to try and see things from her point of view. Doing this means getting to know her which requires hard work. And hard work is a part of love. Murdoch (1970, in Ruddick, 1980) connects imagination with love. And so the hard work of connecting

my imagination with love enables me to see David with love. A love that leads me to remember that David and I are two distinct and separate individuals; that "*two can have a better time than one.*" (Levinas in Kearney, 1984).



'David' makes contact with me

'David' wrote to me (20th August, 1994), telling me very specifically what he wanted from action research for his school:

*(Your action research) appears to be very specific (individually-oriented), relating to a clearly defined problem and goal, while what I am talking about is very broad, the total re-energising and re-empowering of a complete staff of twenty or so people. But I do think that this broad aim could be retained while working towards several smaller and more specific goals.*

In my reply to David (10 September, 1994), I made a judgment on the value of staff days:

*in my experience of doing them for five years they are next to useless if they are only once-off exercises .... there must be follow-through .... with follow-through, they may effect something. As to whether there is any framework which will get all staff moving, changing, I have yet to hear of it!*

I concluded that:

*In my experience, action research is the only framework at the moment where I have evidence that teachers changed their own practices and in turn improved teaching and learning for themselves and their students.*

On November 5, David replied, saying that:

*You made the point in your letter that 'once-off' lecture-type staff-days are of limited value. I can see the point you are making. But not being all that familiar with Action Research and the way it operates, I wonder how the 'follow-through' you mention is organised.*

On January 30 1995 I sent another letter to David and, with it the first edition of an Action Research Newsletter I intended issuing three times per year. I told him that:

*it will give you an idea of the basic ideas (in action research). Essentially, action research is about asking yourself questions of the kind, 'how can I improve my practice?' So it comprises a series of reflective questions and it's only later that the action*

comes.

### Making a commitment

David, replying to me (5 February 1995), said that he *"would rather start working on action research alone, first of all,"* and he tells me that his teaching subjects are:

*Irish and Technical Drawing - an odd combination! The Irish is my degree subject, but the Technical Drawing is a subject which I introduced into the school about fifteen years ago and I have been teaching it ever since .... in the case of Irish .... so many of the students facing Leaving Cert fail to get D.*

Regarding his teaching of Technical Drawing, he wondered how he might introduce greater organisation into it.

As for myself, I was now hoping that David's concerns would be curricular, especially now that he had mentioned the two curricular subjects he teaches. When I say 'curricular', I mean how he might have used his teaching subjects to help his students improve the quality of their learning (Whitehead, 1995: 99).

### David's motivation - 'The topic of discipline and order'

On 6 March 1995, David wrote again, telling me the reasons he wanted to get involved in action research:

*to increase job satisfaction and lessen stress resulting from doing things badly; to act as a catalyst for improvement, starting with myself and spreading out to others; to make the school a better school; to improve on the service offered to the students; to make their lives better; to reenergise myself as I enter the pre-retirement decade and when energised, to energise others.*

He mentioned for the first time the question of his anger towards 'difficult' students who take up so much of his time and deprive other students of his attention. On the other hand, the 'quiet child': *"causes no trouble, would like to learn, but the teacher spends all his*

time 'chewing up' others and creating a threatening, unfriendly atmosphere." The topic of discipline and order was obviously very important to David:

*I'm afraid I'm a bit old fashioned in this area. I can't cope with indiscipline. I have to have discipline in my class or I can't teach. I tend to be strict .... I feel that I can't relax my discipline to have a bit of fun, or to launch into a digression, or whatever, until I have established my discipline.*

He went on to emphasise that "the kids should know the parameters of acceptable behaviour .... and the value of staying inside them." He said he tried not to be confrontational where correction was needed. He did not correct in front of the class but in one-on-one situations.

### My intentions

In my Introduction to the thesis I say that:

*In my encounters with others I believe that it is not the educational intentions that I bring that are paramount so much as the encounters themselves that are educational.*

and that:

*The encounters are educational because others and myself come to mutually accept each other, affirm each other, confirm each other (Buber, 1988: 75). In being accepted, affirmed and confirmed, we are more confidently able to answer questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" and, "How do I live out my values in my practice?" (Whitehead, 1993).*

However, as I was working at accepting, affirming and confirming David, I also wanted David to constantly question what he was thinking, saying and doing and the assumptions on which they were based. I also wanted him to reexamine his present views of 'discipline' as part of our sharing of our reflections in our correspondence. For example, what were the "parameters of acceptable behaviour" his students should know about? Why were they so important? Could they be changed, and if so, why? And if not, why

not? What could replace them? In many of my letters over two years (1994-1996) I raised questions of this sort for David in order to enable him to become more reflexive. As I moved into my educative relationship with David, I wanted to be aware, to be alert to what triggered David's reflections regarding how he could help the quality of learning of his students. I was also hoping that he might experience a sense of liberation, a sense of self-confidence in his capacity to improve what he did in his classroom and in his life because of his reflections and his acting on them. I sincerely believed also that my efforts to accept, affirm and confirm (Buber, 1988: 75) David would help him to more confidently answer questions of the kind, *"How do I improve what I am doing?"* and, *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"* (Whitehead, 1993).

In all of my concerns I was seeking to see where David's imagination might find a foothold, not just within his mind, but also within his students' minds. The working of my imagination is very important to me, but I will return to that later in this chapter. At this time, however, I felt I would have to be 'concrete', to be 'grounded', to consider David's concerns from his point of view. I would have to try and offer the empathy Skolimowski (1994:160-161) talks about when he says it means walking around inside the other, in-dwelling in the other so to speak. I wished to reach out to David, to indicate that he as well as his difficulties or concerns, were reasons for my attention.

That David as a person should be a reason for my attention was borne out by a phrase I remembered from one of his letters: *"I hope that what I have written is of value and can be taken seriously."* I was touched by it and immediately wrote in my journal (5th February, 1995):

*Was David telling me some of his history, albeit a sad part, perhaps of neglect by others of his work and even of himself? If so, I daren't turn my back on his plea. Rather than feeling desolate, I wish David to end up feeling good about himself, good about what he has achieved. This is a test of my humanity, of my efforts to respect and value him!*

In my efforts to empathise with David I may have used words that

were too strong as I described my perception of his feelings about himself as "feeling desolate." I used these words, however, because they were strong words, words that wouldn't allow me to stand idly by concerning David. My *fellow feeling* (Collins, 1992: 154) was aroused. I, myself, had often in my earlier life in particular, felt desolate, unappreciated. I wasn't going to allow anybody I came in contact with to continue to feel 'desolate', or at least, that their worth was unappreciated.

### *How could I enable David to keep a more open mind?*

I wished to let David know that there were alternatives available to him which would represent a freedom he perhaps didn't know he possessed and that this representation might help him to resolve his 'discipline' problems. Regarding freedom, Macquarrie (1983:13) puts the extent and limitations of it very succinctly when he says that I am not entirely constrained by the determining forces or laws of nature. I do have the ability to affect my own environment and to create a better world for myself and others. Macquarrie (ibid) puts it thus:

*Freedom is the empty space, the room that is still left for manoeuvre and has not yet been filled up and determined. We only know it through our own exercise of freedom.*

I wished to persuade David to reach out to grasp whatever freedom was available to him. In my reply to him on 13 March 1995, I was concerned about freedom but also about the value of democracy. His students could experience democracy by being encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. So I challenged David to introduce elements of freedom and democracy through 'creative' dialogue with his students about 'discipline':

*Who benefits from the way you exercise discipline? You? The pupils? Or both? In action research, it is not really enough for you to answer for yourself .... can you really answer for your pupils? Action research is often called emancipatory and participatory, that is, there are freedom and democracy elements in it. Because there are such, then, your pupils' views have to be canvassed as*

well.

Regarding democratic processes in classrooms, I was, and am, much influenced by Laidlaw's (1994: 224-227) premise that there be

*a healthy and educative dialectical relationship between the living out of my democratic ideals and the quality of education I can facilitate in myself and others.*

She adds that: *"I think it is partly in dialogue that we can begin to live out our democratic ideals."* I was hoping that in this educative dialogue, David and I, would come to a realisation of how discipline fitted into the democratic ideal involving freedom. More importantly, I was concerned that David initiate a dialogue with his own students about his idea of discipline which so concerns him.

In my dialogue with David (13th March, 1995) I decided to see if I could attach concern for 'discipline' with David's teaching of his subjects. I linked the two concerns so that David could see that 'discipline' was at the service of an educational question of the kind: *"How can I help my students improve the quality of their learning?"* So I said to him:

*.... could I suggest the following ideas for examination and writing up in your journal:*

*Choose some particular subject you teach, perhaps with a 'difficult' class or some 'difficult' pupils.*

*What are all the bye-laws, local rules and regulations you have governing the conduct of your class in your subject?*

*Ask yourself why you think these regulations are important?*

*Make lists of them if you can, and opposite them write down the reason for their importance.*

*Don't make too many strong value judgments on your reasons for the moment. That can come later.*

*Then try and let yourself be open to other possibilities.*

*Write them down, if you wish also.*

*Now, can you find some non-threatening way in which to ascertain the pupils' views on these bye-laws, local rules and regulations?*

A reminder about the action research cycle

I felt it was important for David, too, to assert himself against me, that being a facet of his freedom. It might also enable more equality to develop between us! So he should not accept any idea from me, no matter how sacred it might be to me, without examining my motives. It was in this spirit that I wrote: *"Attack or challenge me, if you like. That might really be helpful!"* In the next part of my letter, too, I outlined to David the kinds of action research questions he might pursue as he moved towards action. I wished him to follow the action research cycle (Whitehead [1995], in Russell & Korthagen: 118) and to write up his observations, his 'evidence', and so on, as he moved along. So I asked him:

*What do you imagine you could do about your concern(s)? And then, what WILL you do? Followed by: How would you gather 'evidence' around this particular matter of concern?*

#### Discipline was for learning

I was still worried about what I believed was David's 'narrow' approach to 'discipline'. In my 22nd March (1995) letter to David I stressed that discipline was for a purpose, and that purpose was learning. As well as his concern about 'discipline, I asked him:

*What is your personal view of learning? What does it mean to you? What is it that is of great worth that you would want your pupils to learn - and why? Is that what you currently believe is happening?*

These concerns of mine were in response to David's 17th March letter to me which stressed discipline and control and the misbehaviour of some of his students. In it I hear him pleading thus regarding his misbehaving students:

*What about their behaviour?  
What about their poor application?  
What about chronic misbehavers who cause trouble in every class they are capable of causing trouble in, the ones who pick their teacher victim with such cruelty?*

In the same reply to David (ibid), I also took advantage of his view that he didn't really like having to constantly 'discipline'. I mirrored back to him some of his phrases about 'discipline, for example:

*It takes a lot out of me; carrying this home to your family can't be good; If I don't 'screw' myself up into a 'discipline type' I will not be able to cope.*

David feared that he wouldn't be able to cope, that he would not be able to retain his control. I asked him:

*why the fear of not be able to cope, of not being in control? What is so important about that for you? What would a loosening of control look like for you?*

I was trying to see in what way I could loosen David's fear because I believed that it might have been fear that was stopping him from looking at alternatives. I also asked him what was so terrible about his temper exploding! He had told me about that, too. I hadn't intended by that question to imply that exploding with fury was a normal and usual way to act. What I really wanted to get at was David's own view of the rightness or otherwise of exploding with fury. Out of knowledge might come understanding. I had said to him:

*You desire that there shouldn't be confrontational experiences with youngsters and you are 'aware that there are ways of correcting and exhorting' which obviate confrontation. What are your confrontations with youngsters like? And what are the 'ways' that you know about that you would like to try as alternatives?*

*I focused too on the importance of David following the action research cycle*

I was feeling stuck. I didn't seem to be succeeding in helping David to loosen his current view and his fears and anxieties concerning discipline so that he might be able to look at alternatives. My advice regarding following the action research cycle didn't appear to get anywhere either! Were my exchanges with David of any use to him? I was unsure. Maybe there was a need for a change in my style of



enabling him? If he told me how I could help that might enable him to see his concerns more clearly. It was worth a try. Here then is what I said to him:

*Up to now we have been talking about your practice. What about my practice? I want to know how I can understand you, how I can offer presence, listening - whatever it might be that enables you and me to move forward. So, how can we mutually enable one another to move forward? That's it really!*

In his quick reply two days later (24th March, 1995), David told me that I was open, that I gave him the requisite freedom to "*make me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively.*" I needn't have worried then. He was at ease with my style of being open, 'opening doors', inviting free response, not being 'doctrinaire'. Here is the full substance of what David said to me:

*I think you are very good at your practice. By opening every door and by not being doctrinaire about issues, you made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively.*

I was both pleased and nonplused: pleased that David felt my approach was helpful to him, but unsure as to whether anything I had said to him made any difference. Did he listen and hear? Did he listen and ignore and go his own way? Of course, he may also have decided that he needed me mainly as a sounding board for trying out his own ideas because, as he said: "*you made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively.*"

But I was pleased that David had also moved into action. I said to him:

*One thing I am intrigued by is that you made 'some attempts to get feedback from the students on the question of class discipline.' Could I ask you to summarise what happened? And secondly, most importantly, could you quote more or less verbatim what a few of them said? The reason for this is that in action research there is heavy emphasis on inviting other people (in this instance, the pupils) to speak for themselves.*

I felt, too, that hearing from his own students might enable David to become more reflective - at least loosen up his fears about discipline - than perhaps I was able to do through verbalising alone!

*David got down to action, but I was alarmed*

David told me in his May 14th, 1995 letter that he had decided to get down to action. He told me he had distributed a questionnaire on discipline to one of his classes. When I read what he proposed I felt deeply alarmed. In my reply (30th May, '95), I commended David for what he was doing but suggested that his questions were too general. Could he narrow down his concerns to his own class? My questions to him were directed at his own class and at his teaching subject, in particular, Irish:

*Are the students learning something of value in Irish?*

*What is it?*

*If not, why not?*

*So what is it of value I would like to teach them in Irish?*

To enable him to move him forward I suggested that he chose a 'critical friend' - perhaps his wife might be willing - who could help move him forward by questioning him about the evidence he had gathered: What solutions could he imagine? What action would he take? How would he monitor and evaluate it? And I didn't expect David to drop his concern regarding 'discipline.' However, I was wondering if he would deal with these issues within the curricular framework of his own class subjects.

*David's students take responsibility for their own learning!*

On a number of occasions I had asked David to allow his students to take responsibility for their learning. In his letter of 26 August 1995, David told me he had done so. I breathed a sigh of relief. Replying to him (13th September, 1995), I addressed some questions to him to help him move forward with his enquiries. I did this because I hadn't

yet received anything from him that looked like 'evidence' of what he was doing in his various classes:

*Where is the 'evidence' that things have changed for you, David?  
What actions have you taken?  
What has happened?  
And what are your reflections on what has happened?  
What have you said to your critical friend?  
What has your critical friend said to you?  
And to report on all these questions you have to show the voices of others.*

In a follow-up letter to him on 23 October 1995, I told him I was delighted at the calm outlook on life he had told me about. I was delighted also that his attitude towards his students had changed; that he was allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning.

#### *David's 'evidence' in connection with his oral Irish class*

David wrote to me on 14 December 1995. I felt like shouting: "Hurrah!, you've done it!" He said to me: *"I will send you the evidence I have collected so far (to include videos) with comments of my own."* Having viewed David's teaching of oral Irish on the video he had sent me, I replied to him, saying:

*I have to say that I found the drawing part very interesting. You have drawn a box as an example of what you want to get your students to do. They are to describe to you in Irish how they want you to draw it again. And you are to follow their instructions and draw it! I think: Well, now, isn't that a creative idea? However, why no active involvement from your students? All sitting in serried rows facing you. No movement. Are they fearful, bored, controlled, interested? I cannot discern what it is.*

Dawn, David's colleague, seemed to echo my concern. She had visited David's oral Irish class at his request, with a view to testing their oral skills. She said it was like *"dragging language out of the students, that there wasn't a freedom about their language response in general."* It may have been that they were, as I had said to David, maybe *"bored, controlled ...."*

Realising that he had sent me various video segments to do with his 'teaching' without any explanation of what they were about, David wrote to me (February, 10th, 1996) regarding his aims for his teaching of Irish. He was responding to my remarks to him in my letter (23th January, 1996):

*(The) video showed me quizzing my class in oral Irish. This was not a lesson. I had taught my class a body of knowledge .... this was my claim. I was questioning them to show that my claim was justified. And I think that they did very well which, in turn, justified my claim. I claimed to have taught a body of knowledge, that my students had learned that body of knowledge and here was my evidence. I was very pleased with (the video)!!!*

I feel I haven't seen enough evidence gathered over time, to be able to make a judgment on David's work, but I let it pass. Perhaps I had already said too much in my correspondence with David and he was confused.

#### David's students' appraise him and his teaching of oral Irish

David had sent me the handwritten appraisal of his students' Irish language and literature class about what they think of him as their teacher. They had little doubt about his efficacy as a teacher. They accepted his methods of discipline and his conception of fairness and justice. His teaching even allowed them to personally develop themselves, as one of them said: *"You are getting to know about yourself."* The students praised him for *"making efforts to change his teaching methods."* They agreed that he *"treated people equally,"*; that *"he is one of the easier teachers to talk to."* One student, while admitting his dislike for oral Irish, nonetheless had praise for his teacher. Another student referred to David's efforts to *"help the weaker ones,"* and that *"he relates to pupils in a good way as shown in our class."*

I was genuinely flabbergasted by what I read. Why hadn't David let some of this wonderfully good news seep through in all his letters to

me? Maybe he felt that this is what every good teacher did anyway and that it didn't merit making a song and dance about it.

'Carrying out your suggestion re student democracy!'

On his video, I also saw David exercising his role as 'Year Head' of Sixth Years. He reminded me that he was taking on board some of my suggestions regarding democracy and students taking responsibility for their own learning:

*(In this video) I was claiming to have taken on board and at least tried out some of your suggestions re student democracy and hearing the voices of the students and students taking responsibility for their actions.*

On the video I saw David asking his students: *"What is it that makes life hard in this school?"* One questioner answered that there was too much work pressure on him. David asked: *"Where does the pressure come from?"* *"Leaving Cert,"* the student answered. One student alleged that they were always being *"watched by the teachers."* David took up various other themes from the students as, for example, *"this idea of pressure from your teachers, or being coerced, or being dominated, or being made afraid."* He wondered was *"it a good or a bad thing for his students to be afraid of a teacher."* He felt a need, too, to offer two alternatives to his students regarding his own subject, Irish. He could allow them to take responsibility for passing or failing Irish in the State Examination or he himself could take the responsibility on their behalf. My impression was that he felt bound to take responsibility on his students' behalf. He confirmed this view later in his dialogue with the students below.

"The way teachers should treat us"

In the students' responses to David I noticed that they didn't directly comment on his alternatives. They just commented on how they expected teachers to treat them - with respect! There were no neat answers here, just the teacher and his students engaged in trying to

balance their respective needs and ideals.

One student felt that: *"Teachers should be able to get on with their students, shouldn't force them to do anything, should treat them like ordinary people."* But David plaintively asked: *"And what about the people who don't wish to do any work?"* I couldn't help being amused by a second student's quick rejoinder: *"Well, help them ...."* David exclaimed: *"Explain the reason why they should have to! Do it in a nice way! But push it to its extreme: what about the person who says: So what?"* A third student was quite clear about the answer: *"It's up to them."* But David wasn't finished yet, he didn't believe it was their responsibility, it wasn't *"up to (them) .... I say they're too young!"* That is, that it wasn't up to his students to make a choice about studying or not studying his subject, Irish. But another student came in with what I thought was impeccable logic: *"If they want to do it, they'll do it and if they don't, they won't!"* David didn't tell me or the students how he got around this 'logic.' He didn't need: he had the power to make decisions.

At the end of his tape David reiterated that his efforts were directed at trying to *"put the responsibility back on yourselves."* To me, though, there was ambiguity in his approach. I know he sincerely wanted to give responsibility to his students. Yet he also told them that he really felt that they weren't yet *"old enough"* to take responsibility for themselves. However, that was his right. I might have wished it to be otherwise, I might have done otherwise myself, but David was the teacher on the spot. He, not me, had the responsibility for decision making. And he was being responsible.

He also talked, though, with great simplicity and honesty about how he tried to control his temper when he felt angry at some students. I believed that David's integrity lay not only in trying to control his temper but in his open descriptive agonising about how he tried to do it. The students were listening to his agonising. It was perhaps one of his particular singular ways of being democratic:

*I've also actually tried, every time I get mad .... I've tried to get myself to stop and think: is this the best way of doing this, or is*

*there a different way of doing it, or is there a better way of doing it? .... I've tried to get myself to stop and think and say: hold back, count ten, after a while I'll talk to this person .... and in a different way. In other words, I've tried not to be confrontational.*

He didn't over-estimate his ability to treat his students with respect. Yet it was clear to me that he desired to do it to the maximum of his ability:

*I attempted, attempted, remember, to treat people with respect and, especially in a situation where I had to take them aside and chew up them up over something or other. And that's what I am claiming to have done, right?*

Of course, I have evidence from David's Irish class that they apparently accepted his claims! Naturally, I would have liked to have evidence, over time, of the transformation that had taken place. I would like to have heard David's own reflexive theorising about what he did and why he did what he did. But he hadn't gone that far.

#### Some theorising about what I have learnt

Writing to David (7th February, 1996) I was full of admiration for what he had achieved. Thinking particularly of what his students of Irish told him, I said:

*your kids picked up your sincerity, your compassion, your real efforts to make life palatable not only for them but also perhaps for teachers who weren't able to cope! .... There is your openness in all its magnanimity, your desire never to hide your doubts, your weaknesses but also your great gifts of creativity .... There was and is your own huge sincerity. There was and is your valuing of others coming through in your sometimes anguished but also joyous accounts about what it is like to live as a teacher.*

Because I am theorising about what I have learnt in this educative encounter with David, I will repeat some of what I have already said elsewhere. When I was unsure, for example, about moving David forward in his enquiry, he disarmed me by telling me I should continue as I was doing because:

*I think you are very good at your practice. By opening every door and by not being doctrinaire about issues, you made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively.*

I wasn't too doctrinaire then - David didn't think so. I offered him the freedom I hoped he would offer his students: *"You made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head."* He didn't view me as being negatively judgmental: *"You made me feel that .... anything that comes into my head .... would be viewed constructively."* Perhaps he was also telling me that I was tolerant, he had experienced it from me.

He told me too that I had offered him the gift of friendship. A friendship that included helping him with his reflections; that refused payment for my work; that included being patient when he felt his 'thought-processes' were 'sluggish'. A friendship which included enabling him to feel so trusting of me that he was able to share with me 'my deepest thoughts.' He felt I was leaving *"lasting milestones in the form of good relationships in your wake as you progress through life."* Needless to remark I am pleased with this encomium. I didn't succeed, however, in helping David to the extent I wanted. It didn't appear to me that David ended up being any more reflective than he was at the beginning, though his students definitely appreciated what he was doing on their behalf. Maybe I should be satisfied with that? I am satisfied that David was a good human being. I am satisfied that his students deeply appreciated him. Professionally, though, I am questioning if I had been imaginative enough in my efforts to get him to be more creative? Perhaps I could have employed a different *"mode of address"* (Ellsworth, 1997: 1-2), which may have more adequately addressed both his professional and personal needs. What do I mean by a different *"mode of address"*?

Ellsworth (ibid) says it is an analytical concept which essentially means: *"Who do I think you are?"* as I addressed David within the context of his values, gifts, talents, experience. There is a corollary, too: *"What difference does my address make to how David reads his professional and personal life?"* Two gaps normally exist regarding my



mode of address. One is the gap or the lack of fit that exists between what and how I address David and the actual 'psychic effect of feeling' of David who receives it. The second gap is my realisation of the significance of the boundary that exists between the 'outside' (my address, my communication with David as other) and the 'inside' (David's and my individual psyche and our individual understandings). The 'outside' and the 'inside' are 'never stable' (Donald, 1992: 2). So there exists then a gap between my self and David's self, between the 'inside' and the 'outside.' My usual mode of communicative dialogue doesn't necessarily bridge these gaps, isn't perhaps even able to cross them.

Perhaps my dialogue is expected to carry too much 'meaning.' I am expecting it to enable David to construct knowledge, to solve problems, to ensure democracy, to constitute collaboration, to secure understanding, to fulfil my desire for communication (Ellsworth, 1997: 49). I have always felt that I communicated through continuity, through understanding. Perhaps what I now need to do is to communicate through discontinuity and through knowing that I will always lack full understanding of the other in dialogue. To communicate, in other words, through the paradox of "*manipulating (the other) into taking on responsibility*" (Ellsworth, 1997: 150-151) for their own understanding, their own learning. And perhaps to bear in mind too that, "*all modes of address misfire one way or another*" (ibid). Why? Because "*I never 'am' the 'who' that a(n) .... address thinks I am.*" And, "*I never am the one that I think I am either.*" My efforts then to influence David and to write up my conclusions are bound to be messy. Ellsworth (ibid) explains this when she says that: "*the .... relation between student and teacher is a paradox.*" If that is so, then the problems and dilemmas I face in David's regard, "*can never be settled or resolved once and for all.*" Phillips (1993: 108) augments this view when he says that: "*(the educative) relation itself is unpredictable, uncontrollable, unmanageable, disobedient.*" This lack of final conclusion which, paradoxically, is for me synonymous with openness, with freedom to continue exploring, gives me confidence. Much of the rest of these conclusions then are about being open to exploration, being open to further growth through freedom of

thought and its expression. But first, I consider below how I communicated initially with David in his action research enquiry.

In my dialogue and enquiry with David I was anxious to enable him to cultivate an enquiring mind. But apart from enabling David to become a more reflective action researcher, I wanted to respect him, to give him cause for his hope. A part of my respecting and valuing David was, however, to challenge him as with John in chapter 3. If I didn't, he would have had cause to say, I believe, that his concerns, his work and perhaps he, himself, weren't worth valuing by me. In an attempt to enable David to become more reflective, I offered him a description and explanation of my 'difficulties' at the college in which I worked. It sparked off in him a realisation that he had never been encouraged to reflect. In his reply to me on March, 13th, 1996, he told me that he was uplifted by my personal knowledge of myself. That I had the ability to articulate that knowledge. That he felt he hadn't been given that opportunity in his initial teaching training, that his 'I' didn't apparently merit attention. That he had been conditioned into "*looking outwards towards and never looking inwards towards ourselves ....*" He told me too that he wanted 'to grow' as a person. My sharing of the difficulties I experienced brought it to his attention:

*I wonder at your ability to lay yourself bare .... in front of me and others. I applaud your honesty and your humility. You know, Ben, I'm 'taking notes' all the time because so much of what you express so well has an echo inside my own head and heart as well and, if I may, I intend to grow on your growth. Not being able to see things clearly inside myself and not having the language to articulate them, even to myself, stops me from dealing with them. But you manage to express them so well and reading your words enables me to see more clearly areas of tension and stress in my own world that I should deal with.*

David apparently found my reflective questions helpful. He felt I had given him great scope to ask anything of me that he wanted to ask and that I didn't judge him. I had much reason then to feel pleased. I can still improve, however! So, my question for myself now is:

*How could I have helped David to grow more as a person and action researcher so that he could possibly have been better*

*equipped to help his students improve the quality of their learning?*

Let me put it this way. Making meaning is important, not just conceptually but actually and practically. I believe that David's growth could possibly have been moved forward more if he had more thoroughly understood why he was doing what he was doing. Jersild (1955: 78) puts this very clearly for me when he says:

*Meaning constitutes, in many respects, the substance of the self .... Where there is meaning, there is involvement. When something has meaning, one is committed to it; where there is meaning, there is conviction.*

The search for meaning involves self-examination. That can be painful and therefore anxiety-provoking (Cole, 1997:14). But according to Ghaye and Ghaye (1998: 41), there is need for a 'developing sense of self' in order to control and own, at least to some extent, what the individual does in their educational lives. This sense of self is made up of the individual's personal history of joys and achievements, sadnesses as well as future intentions and ambitions. It is both intrapersonal and interpersonal in that the individual needs to understand both their own selves and their relationship to others. The process involved in this two-fold understanding of the self and of the relationship with others can be seen as a component part of spirituality. But how can the self be related to others?

Stevens (1996, in Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998: 18) tells me how I can relate the self to others when, firstly, I become conscious "*of a world within of inner thoughts, feelings and reflections*" and, secondly, when I use this kind of reflection to help me "*to do things, to initiate new and better actions and events.*" Ghaye and Ghaye refer to this process as 'agency'. By being reflective, and helping David and others to become reflective, I develop this sense of agency and, therefore, hold myself responsible for the actions I have or appear to have chosen to do. Lomax (1994: 13) favours the notion of the developing self, too, when she says that "*an aim is for .... research to be educational in the sense of self developing,*" and that we can do so "*through enquiring into our own practice,*" thereby creating "*a living form of educational theory ....*"

As I am doing what Lomax (1994: 13) suggests - developing my sense of self through enquiring into my practice - I want to keep an eye on who I am becoming. I want to see in what way I am becoming "*self-actualised*" (Allport, 1961, in Bischof, 1970: 296). Am I, for example, becoming more secure and accepting of myself? Am I extending my sense of self beyond my self, indicating that I am interested in more than my self? Am I relating warmly to others in both intimate and non-intimate contacts? Am I coming to see myself as important, but not overpoweringly so? Am I doing what is natural for me personally to be doing? (Bennis, 1993: 1-2). Am I keeping covenant with my own individual promise? What I want and am working towards for myself, I want for David also.

David had already told me about his fears and anxieties. Fears and anxieties are products I believe of feeling at the mercy of 'forces' outside myself, over which I believe I have no control. What then, could have put control back into David's hands, could have helped him to feel more self-authoring? There is no final, definitive answer to this question, only possibilities that may, or may not, work. However, being more reflective may have supplied more meaning to David's work, a meaning that would have enabled him to grow more perhaps than he had. But to enable David to become reflective - and I have to be open to the possibility that it wouldn't happen - I would have had, I believe, to strongly involve his imagination. He had already told me as a result of private information about myself that I had given him, that his imagination was sparked off. When our collaboration was nearly at an end, reflection began to have meaning for David. But perhaps it had needed more imaginative input from me in our dialogues. As Macmurray (1993: 56) puts it: "*the basic reflective skill .... is imagination.*"

*Using the power of my own imagination to make a difference*

So what could I have done that might have made a difference? I believe I could have used the power of my own imagination to make a

difference to David. But my immediate question here is: why is imagination important as an aid to reflection? A part of the answer at least is that I do imaginings every day, every night, every time I dream (Kearney, 1991: 9). Every time I pretend, play, fantasise. Every time I invent, lapse into reverie, remember times past or project better times to come. But why, in the poet's words, do I want to murder imagination to dissect? I am personally convinced that my imagination lies at the heart of my existence, that I wouldn't really be human without it. Because I am so used to it perhaps I too easily take it for granted, assume it as given - and so am often inattentive to it.

According to Murdoch (1997: 199-200), imaginings are not just drifting ideas. Imagining is something which I do a lot of the time. It may not be rational, logical thinking, but thinking it is. But of what kind? It is

*a type of reflection on people, events, etc., which builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities in ways which go beyond what could be said to be strictly factual. Imagining is doing, it is a sort of personal exploring .... Our freedom is said to consist in our ability to remove ourselves into a region where we can assess situations upon which our imagination has already worked, even if as 'fantasy'. 'Fantasy', shouldn't be seen as a barrier to our seeing 'what is really there.'*

Murdoch (ibid) says that our values have their genesis in our active imagination. Our imaginations as human beings help us, she believes, "to know more than any one can prove, to conceive of a reality which goes 'beyond the facts' in .... familiar and natural ways."

Murdoch joins with Husserl in believing that: "Imagination is a kind of freedom, a renewed ability to perceive and express the truth" (ibid, p. 255). For me as for Murdoch, I don't want to use my imagination "to escape the world but to join it" (p. 374) in ways that are greatly enriched because I am using the 'pictures' I am combining into novel forms in my head. Without imagination I would be an automaton unable to learn. Without imagination I would merely be able to imitate (Kelly, 1956: 85).

### *My intention regarding my 'interior monologue'*

Offering an interior monologue below is part of my effort to show how I might have better tuned into David's values, gifts, talents, experience, as Ellsworth(1997) suggests. It consists in my use of my imagination in order to see can I put Ellsworth's idea into practice. This different mode of address might better have helped David to understand his professional life; might have helped to address what Ellsworth calls both the 'outside' and the 'inside'. I accept that however I address David I will never have a guarantee of success because "*all modes of address misfire one way or another*" (Ellsworth, 1997). I do want to try, however, to exercise my leadership in action research differently by imagining, and so, bringing feelings and visualisation into play. In order to do so I intend using an interior monologue.

What is the meaning of 'interior monologue'? It means showing the way in which my thoughts and memory work in my inner mind and how it reveals my feelings, perhaps without undue thought as to logical sequence. The interior monologue I composed below, is holistic, imaginative, even poetic. It helps me to expresses imaginatively, my values, in this instance, those of trust, respect and care, some of the sub-sets as it were of my value of love. And how, as a result of past experiences, I came to hold these values. In my writing here I am using the interior monologue below to show how I could have complemented my use of the action research cycle in my educative relationship with David. It seems to me now that my research questions to him throughout our educative relationship had taken, perhaps too strongly, a linear, sequential, rational quality. I believe I am now learning that I may need to 'mix' different methods in my educative relationship with those with whom I work!

Though not inimical to thinking logically, 'rationally', linearly and sequentially (I have been 'educated' that way), I have always wanted to use my capacity for emotional rationality (Macmurray, 1957/1991). By that I mean what I said in Taylor *et al* (in Press):

*that my 'feeling the world' is more basic than my thinking it. Feeling is the touchstone of reality, my reality. In using my emotions in dialogue and in my descriptions .... I am showing my concern for myself and for others as persons. My emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) embraces zeal and persistence, the ability to motivate myself, and that leads me towards my moral instincts in my relationship with others .... Without caring, compassion and empathy I believe my explanations of my spiritual values...would be seriously deficient .... At the same time, I am not attempting to oppose one form of rationality with another, the intellectual with the emotional. Rather, am I attempting to use both ....*

### *My understanding of my interior monologue*

Now to my understanding of the interior monologue I present below. The sense I make of it owes much to Pat D'Arcy (a researcher critical friend) who previously read the monologue. In this section, prior to the introduction of my actual interior monologue, I make use of the two kinds of personally meaningful response that Pat talks about in her thesis (1998) as being an engaged response and appreciative response, according to which

*the reader experiences the text first as s/he reads and then responds to that experience - s/he describes what went on inside his/her head, what thoughts, what feelings, what visual impressions. There is also an appreciative response, according to which 'the reader lets the writer know what it was about the way s/he presented the text that enabled her/him to experience it in the way s/he did'.*

Broadly, I follow these guidelines in the setting up of my interior monologue, though I hadn't known about them when I composed the monologue. Below I introduce the *setting* for the interior monologue, that is, the *name* of the group, the *date*, *venue* and *time*. I also offer a summary of what happened. After that I offer a short narrative of how the 'action' moved along before I come to the interior monologue itself.

#### Setting

**Name:** Action Research in Educational Theory Research Group.

**Date:** 29th January, 1996.  
**Venue:** University of Bath,  
**Time:** 5.00 p.m. - 7.00 p.m.

### Summary

- Ray**      *It has cost me a lot to attend this module and I come here to learn. And I am not hearing you telling us what you've learned and how you've learned it? I feel my time is being wasted.*
- Ben**      *Sue, What question would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?*
- Sue**      *I'm going to write a story.*

Ray is one of the action researchers present at an action research meeting at the University on 29th January, 1996. Sue is another of the participants at the meeting. She had agreed at a previous meeting that she would make a presentation at this meeting in which she would outline how she learned what she had learned from helping her students to do art. She would do so while also showing us the pieces of art her students had done.

The actual monologue starts with my silent comment on Ray's apparent insensitivity, which I see as a judgment on Sue: *"It has cost me a lot to attend this module ...."* That sentence provokes me into a torrent of questions, all of which are unspoken. This starkly contrasts with the struggle I'm going through to find the right words to help Sue move forward in her enquiry. After my questions, I indicate that there is still more to be said: that she still hasn't explained how she gets her students to paint. I am preoccupied with the questions: *"how does she do it"* and *"how can I help Sue to articulate that and in what way?"* Incidentally, it doesn't worry me that Sue never answered my question. She obviously had her own interior question to answer, one she perhaps formulated during the meeting. So she was perhaps answering her own question when she said: *"I'm going to write a story."* In any case, I move into a lyrical, poetic chant, which is my way of recognising, affirming and celebrating my values of trust, respect and care. They reveal to me



how I can respond to Sue. I have found these values because of what I already know affectively and intellectually about myself.

As the monologue progresses there is mounting tension - time is running out: "6.55 p.m. .... we stop at 7.00 p.m." My unuttered thoughts too speed up. Will they, or will they not, however, be uttered? Will there be time? While I maintain my outer calm, inwardly my feelings are in turmoil. At this point, I dramatically and poetically personify my emotions of NEGLECT, HURT, CARE (in capital letters) standing near me, contending with each other - which of them will win? Then on the stroke of the hour, 7.00 p.m. in answer to my question: "Sue, What question would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?," I hear an expression of intent from Sue: "I am going to write a story" I relax, I've done my duty. CARE has won and I've been responsible. I have helped Sue - at least from my point of view! My responsibility of care has been fulfilled.

#### *My actual interior monologue*

*I listen to Ray with mounting fury. I could feel the hurt inside me. For whom? For me? Why for me? For Sue? Yes, for me but for her, too! Does she need my hurt? No, probably not.*

*Why do I react to Ray's statement with such fury? Fear of damage to Sue? Or a far distant childhood memories of 'put-down' experiences? That did not occur to me there and then. Only in hindsight. Childhood experiences are my security guards. They warn me of approaching danger. Not just to myself. But also to others.*

*Ray's statement - self-interest, is that it? Is that the motive? Am I being judgmental and unfair? Probably! But I ask: is he looking at Sue as a person in her own right? Does he notice that she is different to him? Has different thought patterns? Different motivations? Different experiences? She hesitates, and rightly so!*

*Can she trust? Who can she trust? She is - a woman. And he is  
- a man.*

*I look at Sue's face and her eyes. Animated! Ray's onslaught  
doesn't seem to have affected her. Or has it? When I feel hurt I  
probably show it. Isn't she hurt? If she is, why doesn't she show  
it? Is it the art of concealment, learned over centuries? As a form  
of self-preservation. Don't let others see my hurt! But am I just  
speaking for myself? Feeling the hurt I expect her to feel?*

*And the words. Sue's words, spoken throughout the session,  
match her animation. Yet do not reveal. Do not reveal the why,  
the how. Her photographs of her kids paintings do. Could she  
explain them? Get her kids to explain them?*

*Is it logical, rational analytical arguments - or questions - that  
sway me in the immediacy of the present moment and move me  
towards action, towards communication? No. What is it, then? It  
is the inner voice of intuition,  
based on experience.*

*On values:*

*like trust,  
your trust in me  
your trust makes me feel I can do it.*

*Respect.*

*Your respect for me.*

*Your respect for me makes me feel important.*

*Treatment.*

*Your treatment of me.*

*Your treatment of me makes me feel unique.*

*You are telling me I am somebody.*

*That I am different.*

*Different from anybody else who has ever existed.*

*Assurances -*

*I need them.  
No need to put them into words.  
I'll know when you have considered me!*

*So how can I find a way to respond to Sue that will enable her to  
open up to what she knows?*

*My trust.  
My trust in her.*

*Respect.  
My respect for her.*

*Care.  
My care for her.  
For her uniqueness.*

*And so for me the question is:  
'What type of question, what form of words?'  
And I am suffering.  
It is intense, my effort.  
To know what to articulate.  
To know how to articulate.  
I am wondering how do I connect with Sue?  
I don't use a rational, logical, analytical way of knowing. I rely on  
and listen to my inner self, to my inner 'still small voice'. It is my  
personal, firsthand knowledge I am appealing to.*

*I see you as totally alive, and I feel your energy, Sue. Yet you are  
not telling what it is you know. And there is little time left. It is  
now 6.55 p.m. We stop at 7.00 p.m. Our session is nearly over.  
And I haven't yet found the words. I do want my words to  
connect with you, person to person, so that you know you have  
been addressed. And then you will know what has happened  
and - that it has happened!*

*Haven't others done it? They have.*

*Isn't that enough? No!*

*There must be some good I can do every time I meet someone. I can't neglect you! I daren't! My alter egos, HURT and NEGLECT, warn me, glare at me from the darkness! Their eyes pierce me to the quick. I cannot escape them. They are provoking me with their energy and they know it! If they are a little shaken that I have found CARE they don't show it. Their self-esteem daren't admit it. Daren't admit that an interloper crept in when they weren't looking!*

*I am not afraid that good will be left undone. It is being done and will be done by others. But it will be left undone by me if I am there and say nothing. But I don't just want to say something, anything.*

*I want to say something significant.*

*Significant.*

*Significant to Sue.*

*Important.*

*Important to her.*

*Something that will connect with her.*

*Connect with her interiorly.*

*Something that will tell her that she is worthwhile.*

*Respected.*

*Cared for.*

*Being enabled to move forward.*

*Time is so short - 6.57 p.m.! Time is nearly up. I haven't yet found the right question. And connected with Sue. That is of overwhelming importance to me. And yet I am unable yet to do it. I think my own feelings are getting in the way. NEGLECT, HURT and CARE are saying to me: 'Hurry - time is nearly up!' Yes, they are real. They have become personified. They wouldn't be strong enough otherwise. Two of them just marched up on me. Consequently, I can't ignore them. Out of my subconscious they*

came. The first two, NEGLECT and HURT stop. Loom over me. Challenge me. Challenge me to forget! CARE follows in the vanguard, softly, unnoticed. And takes its place by my side. Not interfering. But present, reassuring. In spite of the din of HURT and NEGLECT: 'Don't worry. What you do or say will be okay! Attend to your feelings, trust them and then attend to Sue.'

How can I attend to you, Sue? I think I could do it more easily if we were meeting in a one-to-one situation. Excuse? Shyness! More than likely!

We are not in a one-to-one situation. Feeling distracted by the others present. Yet I want to attend to you, Sue, and to them also! Problems! Complex problems! Trying to serve 'two masters'. Impossible? No. Difficult? Yes. But I'll have to learn to do it!

On the one hand, a part of me,  
the self-serving part,  
would like to put on a performance.  
Yes, a performance!  
Of wisdom.

To say something that would sound not only incredibly wise but, be so. But I also know that that would alienate. That is the last thing I want. I don't want to be a charlatan. I am deeply concerned for Sue. I want her to find a way to unlock what it is she knows.

7.00 p.m. We've arrived at the endpoint. My question, born of my own travail, almost stillborn and struggling for life, is:

'What question, Sue, would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?'

Can I offer a rational explanation for this question? No. It is an intuitive reaction. Arising from the gut, eventually! Not thought out. I just felt it. It wasn't constructed. But I'm the conduit through

*which it passed!*

*I don't know what it means. Nonetheless, I feel it may enable Sue to take responsibility for herself. I haven't told her what to do. Not least because my reality is different to hers. All our realities are different. I'm not sure either that I have found a way to connect with her. However, HURT and NEGLECT flee back to the nether regions from which they came. I move back from the encounter.*

*CARE lingers in the between  
Not fully connecting Sue and me.  
But, hovering. Neither uneasy or sad.  
Waiting.  
Available.  
Knowing its power as friendship in a moral endeavour.  
Faithful.  
It knows there will be other times.  
There is never an end.  
There is always hope!*

*The question seemed to refocus Sue:*

*"I am going to write a story."*

*I don't know what happened within her, but I heard her make a commitment.*

### *My new learning*

What I wanted most of all for David was what I wanted for Sue - to be able to connect with both of them in order to enable them to move forward educatively. *"That,"* as I said in the interior monologue above, *"is of overwhelming importance to me. And yet I am unable to do it."* But, of course, that proved to be untrue. I did finally connect with Sue. I connected with David too at the end in a way that I found more satisfactory than formerly. That happened when I offered him

my writing about the difficulties I had experienced between 1993 and 1995 at the college where I had worked. He told me that it touched him emotionally. It was then, for the first time that I felt that new learning, for him and for me, was taking place. For him, repressed memories of not being encouraged to be reflective came rushing into his consciousness. Afterwards, he wrote me a beautiful letter about the quality of freedom and democracy within his own family life. Because his letter was private and personal, I don't feel at liberty to reveal it here. Suffice it to say that I believe that the convergence of memory, imagination and feelings, all seemed to me to bring David to a place he had perhaps forgotten about, to a place of openness where he could take risks, where perhaps the 'ever shall be' of most of his life could be reversed.

What I learned was that using my imagination as shaped by my interior monologue had liberated me. In it I had poetically shown the importance of showing respect and care, as opposed to HURT and NEGLECT, which had now fallen back into the *"nether regions from which they had come."* Hidden, but no less important, were the values of perseverance, persistence and steadfastness I had shown in my determination to find - even if only in retrospect - an alternative or a complement to the more usual mode of the action/reflection cycle. Interior monologues, complemented by the action research cycle, may help me in the future to better enable teachers to ask and answer questions of the kind, *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"* and, *"How can I help my students improve the quality of their learning?"*

Regarding David, how could my care and persistence enable him to open up perhaps repressed ways of thinking about his practice, about the conventional, taken-for-granted ways in which he had taught for many years? What could I do to help him to move towards being more creative in his answers to his concerns? My strict adherence to the linear, rational and sequential action/reflection cycle, though dialogical, may not have been the best way for me to help liberate David's imagination. I am beginning to realise that a part of my explanation for my living educational theory is that it is living when its form is living. And its form is living when it is open-ended and

contains my continuing intention to create something better (McNiff *et al*, 1996: 21).

### *Creating something better*

It is with the intention "*to create something better*" that I now return to discuss my use of imagination. I believe it has always played a key role in helping me to understand myself and others. Although I don't mention God in the imaginative interior monologue above in my mind's eye I see God's place in it. I see it because I deal with my efforts to understand the other and my self in the monologue. In understanding and knowing my self and the other, I also understand and know my God.

I want to know myself and others. To be able to do so I believe I have to assume the viewpoint or attitude of others. I do that through having a sympathetic imagination. In this I am reminded of Buber (1988: 81) who said:

*Applied to intercourse between (people), 'imagining the real' means that I imagine to myself what another (person) is at this very moment wishing, feeling, perceiving, thinking, and not as a detached content but in his (her) very reality, that is, as a living process in this (person).*

Regarding my interior monologue above, it is not an artifice I constructed to fit my analysis here in this chapter. I wrote it before I constructed this chapter and it flowed, unbidden, from my inner self without pause for reflection or consideration of "*how is it going?*" It was only when I was wondering how I might have attempted a more imaginative alternative action research strategy to the action research cycle with David that I remembered it and then reproduced it here.

Regarding the interior monologue above, I deeply desire to understand what Sue wishes, feels, perceives and thinks in a way which lives for me. In fact my effort at imagining the real in a way which lives for me leads me to feel passionately angry that Sue is



apparently being put down by Ray's insistence that he feels he has wasted his time - and money - coming to an action research meeting on 29th January, 1996. He is annoyed that Sue isn't telling us what and how she has learned! In the monologue my sympathy shows not only my sense of my self, but also of my wanting to see others as dearer to me than myself. I agree with how Hanson (1986: 133) puts it:

*Just as imagination can take us to our selves, it can carry us out of and beyond ourselves - if we are interested, if we see some object as dearer to us than ourselves.*

I believe that I see Sue in that moment as "*being dearer to (me) than (myself).*" Levinas (in Kearney, 1984: 47-70) teaches me a similar lesson when he stresses that my obligation to the other comes before myself, comes before my freedom. Even if I deny my responsibility by affirming my freedom as primary, I can never escape the fact that the other has demanded a response from me before I affirmed my freedom not to respond to his/her demand. My capacity then to imagine myself in the place of the other, as I believe I did with Sue, shows what it means to me to respect the other. I believe, I have stretched my capacity for using my emotional intelligence in pursuing fairness to David in ways that respected him.

But actually, I seek to show more than respect. Love is really what I seek. To show love of my neighbour, love of David and, also, love of God. Interestingly, Murdoch (1970, in Ruddick, 1980: 350-3) tells me that love is connected with knowledge when she says that "*Love is knowledge of the individual,*" an insight she connects both to the Christian and Platonic tradition. To get to know the individual requires hard work. Hard work is a part of love. Murdoch, in connecting love with imagination, suggests to me that it is my use of my imagination which helps me to see Sue, and now David, and others too, with love. And so I gain the kind of knowledge I need to show me ethically what I must do. In imagining being placed where Sue and, indeed, David were placed, I am able to imagine what is true for me, but partly also to feel as they felt. Of course, I also know that their feelings may not be the same as my own. Nevertheless

using my imagination in this way helps me, I believe, to more nearly gauge other people's feelings and also my responsibility towards them and how I might beneficially use it. An exercise in learning to love. A love that acknowledges the importance of 'difference', a notion that Levinas (in Kearney, 1984: 183) puts this way:

*Man's relationship with the other is better as difference than as unity: sociality is better than fusion. The very value of love is the impossibility of reducing the other to myself, of coinciding into sameness. From an ethical perspective, two can have a better time than one.*

While thinking of David and my relationship with him, I want to consider in more depth the meaning of the values of freedom and love, my relationship values which I have been trying to practise towards David and others. I want to consider also where else in my life these values are manifest. And so, I consider how I am bringing them together as two sides of the same coin as I have been trying to answer questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" and "*How do I live out my values in my practice?*"

In turning to Reidy (1990: 22) it appears to me that he links freedom and love together seamlessly. He explains freedom as action, as engagement. He says it is about having a large heart, being answerable to myself, and to others. It is about reaching out to others and wanting to. It is about morality, a morality that challenges me by asking what I propose to do and how I am going to do it, about how I propose to live and how I am going to live. It is a morality which seeks to help me to off-load whatever compulsive desire I may have to control David, or indeed others, by having recourse to rules, fear, insecurity, or self-preservation. It is a moral freedom about my ability to act as well as refraining from acting. It is a moral freedom which continuously engages in a dialectic between my affections and my will. In my affections it is "*a kind of intelligence, a quality of attentiveness*" which is sensitive to my instincts and desires in order to discern what is "*most true.*" In my will, it is a judgment about making choices among alternatives, without which I wouldn't have freedom in the first place. I feel, in my educative relationship with David, that I have been trying to offer him a quality

of 'attentiveness' which is, for me, a part of the quality of love. In terms of freedom, I have been trying to bring him to consider alternatives to his taken-for-granted way of thinking. However, it was only when I was writing this chapter that I realised how I could address that concern in a more creative way by using an interior monologue.

Whatever ambitions I have had for David, in the end I have had to let them go. I don't own David's mind, imagination - or practice! I don't own his creativity. I can, and did, make suggestions. He possesses - and possessed - freedom to accept or reject them. He exercised that freedom. I believe I have finally been able to exercise my love towards David by not reducing him to myself, by not allowing coincidence into 'sameness', the sameness that is me. I am now ready to accept that David and I can have a better time as two distinct and separate individuals; that "*two can have a better time than one*" (Levinas in Kearney, 1984).

#### Addressing two of my claims to educational knowledge

In this chapter I have been addressing, through my descriptions and explanations of my relationships with Sue and David, two distinct and original claims (Abstract) I make to educational knowledge:

*I show the meaning of my values as I explain my educative relationships in terms of how I dialectically engage the intrapersonal with the interpersonal.*

and,

*I show how a dialectic of both care and challenge that is sensitive to difference, is enabling me to create my own living educational theory which is a form of improvisatory self-realisation.*

A long time before I wrote this chapter I constructed the interior monologue above in which I described a searing experience, imprinted

in my memory, of hurt and neglect when I was young. I summarised it thus as: *"far distant memories of 'put-down' experiences."* I would have liked, I wrote, to have been treated with trust and respect, to be offered assurance and care. I described myself as listening, *"with mounting fury"* at an action research meeting, to Ray attacking Sue, an art teacher, because, as he said, *"I am not hearing you telling us what you've learned and how you've learned it. I feel my time is being wasted."* I was aware in that instant of my "I" existing as a living contradiction in holding values and experiencing their denial at the same time as I was silently asking myself questions of the kind, *"How do I improve my practice?"* and *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"*

Because I felt Sue was being denied the care which I felt was her due, I made a commitment to helping her. I wished to say something *"significant,"* something *"important"* that would *"tell her that she is worthwhile."* I felt I could best do so by asking her an open-ended question: *"What question, Sue, would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?"* Sue, in choosing to offer an answer to her own interior question, *"I am going to write a story"* was, I believe, opting for freedom from any kind of imposition, as a person claiming originality and exercising her own personal judgment (Polanyi, 1958: 327). It was the kind of freedom I wanted her to have, a freedom that I felt Ray had been attempting to deny her.

Similarly with David: I wanted him to know that he could learn how to become free by exercising it (Macquarrie, 1983: 13) in respect of his 'discipline' problems. Feeling at one point unable to help him, I wrote, asking him, *"how I can understand you?"* His reply told me I had already offered him the freedom and acceptance he needed: *"By opening every door and by not being doctrinaire about issues, you made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively."*

In terms of showing *"a dialectic of care and challenge that is sensitive to difference,"* I offered an open question to Sue as a sign of my care for her, but also as a challenge to grow and change. She accepted my

challenge. Asking David to take up my “*suggestions re student democracy*” was an invitation and a challenge to him that would, I hoped, help him to loosen himself from his fears and anxieties about his classroom discipline. He took up my challenge, but as to whether it helped to loosen his fears and anxieties remained problematical. In the end, then, I came to recognise that wanting David *to be* was less important than *accepting him as he was*; that in Levinas's (in Kearney, 1984: 63) words:

*The ethical 'I' is subjectivity precisely in so far as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call of the other.*

The interior monologue helped me to engage with the intrapersonal and reveal my feelings, especially those of freedom and love. Feelings are the moral agents that motivate me to be zealous and persistent in showing my care and concern to others. This revelation of my feelings and the accompanying explanation would, I felt, move forward my own self-realisation, my own educational development, as I was creating my own living educational theory.

In terms of my relationship with David, my use of the linear, rational, logical form of the action research cycle didn't seem to be helping him to loosen himself from his fears and anxieties concerning discipline, wasn't helping him to become more creative. As I did with this interior monologue, so in the future I want to use my imagination and enable teacher researchers to use theirs in ways that complement the use of the action research cycle.

## **Chapter 5**

### **How do I explore and explain the nature of a professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at a college of education and come to an understanding of how to resolve that conflict as I exercise my leadership 'differently'?**

**Summary** In writing this chapter I wanted to explain how I exercised my leadership of an action research project (1993-1995) despite opposition and conflict, as I worked at a college of education between 1990 and 1995.

Some months after I wrote this chapter I realised that in writing it I had answered the title-question in a way that satisfied me, but had made no reference to the following knowledge claim that I also associated with this chapter:

*I show how my leadership comes into being in my words and actions as I exercise my ethic of responsibility towards others.*

My strong feelings of anger at being denied my values of dignity, respect and freedom, and the fairness I associate with care, had blinded me to a factor other than the conflicts I experienced. What was this factor? At the time I was experiencing my various leadership conflicts with colleagues and the college principal, I was also genuinely trying to exercise my "ethic of responsibility" towards the teachers and others I was supporting in their action enquiries, as I explained in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6.

In retrospect, I now recognise that exercising my "ethic of responsibility" towards the teachers and others was a balancing factor in helping me to answer the title-question of the chapter: "How do I explore and explain the nature of a professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at a college of education and come to an understanding of how to resolve that conflict as I exercise my leadership 'differently'?" I now recognise also that in offering acceptance,

affirmation and confirmation to the teachers I was supporting in their action enquiries, I, too, was receiving it in turn from them, thus bolstering my strength and courage to face my various leadership 'conflicts'.

But, despite various conflicts, how did I describe and explain my leadership of the action research project? I wrote about how I allowed nobody's expectations of me to pre-define how I should act as leader of the action research project. I took up a stance of nonconformity towards the expectations of the staff members with whom I worked. I found that my leadership came into being, over time, in my words and actions as I exercised it 'differently'. I exercised it 'differently' by "*constantly enact(ing) it,*" constantly "*accomplish(ing) it*" (Sinclair, 1998). I began experimenting in an improvisatory way "*with self-revelation, with resistance, with trying to build new paths*" (Sinclair, 1998).

My experience of having my values of dignity, respect, freedom and right to fairness denied when I was an action research project leader, helped me to answer a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self. But what kind of freedom did I win? I became free in so far as I was able to handle my then circumstances as leader. Being free didn't necessarily mean I was autonomous (Marcel in Roberts, 1957: 304). Becoming free didn't, for example, entail me in 'action' in the sense of being able to change the 'power relations' I experienced at the college. No, but I did seek and win interior freedom, a freedom that when complemented by love, helped me, I believe, in connecting the personal with the professional in my educative relationships with teachers and others.

*I attempt to acquire 'objectivity' and 'distance'*

Having completed a first draft of this chapter on 9th June, 1998, I decided there was an imbalance between my subjectivity and a necessary objectivity. I was not only too subjective, but my subjectivity took the form of huge negative emotion directed towards those whom I judged had emotionally injured me. If I left the previously completed draft as it was I was sure it would be self-serving and be seen to be so. That was unsatisfactory. So I did two things. I laid this June draft aside and asked myself the question:

*How could I continue to use my subjectivity and yet be sufficiently objective when examining and reexamining my motives and actions?*

And even if I didn't fully succeed in finding a balance between negative subjectivity and objectivity, could I at least become less self-serving? I wished to be involved holistically, to have my emotions as well as my intellect and reason involved; to have my emotions aroused and engaged, allied with my intellect and reason, so I could write authentically about matters that caused me immense grief. I wanted to be authentic, to be true both at the subjective and the objective level. I then wanted to share inter-subjectively what I discovered and hoped it could be understood holistically by being grasped both at the intellectual and at the emotional, more personal, levels (Roberts, 1957: 7).

I find useful Popper's (1959: 44) view that objectivity is grounded in inter-subjective criticism when he says that: *"I shall therefore say that the objectivity of scientific statements lies in the fact that they can be inter-subjectively tested."* In other words, my difficulty with being too subjective can be counter-balanced at social validation meetings of my action research group at the University of Bath, where the group can help me to objectify in order that I may be able to change.

Dadds (1995a:106) is helpful when she said that it is necessary for me to objectify if I am to be open to change. I need to be able to separate my sense of my self from the 'self' reflected in my



descriptions *"in order to see and think anew"* (ibid). Dowrick and Biggs (1983: 221, in Dadds, 1995a) suggest that *"Immediately .... one is sufficiently distanced from events, questions arise."* According to them, this *"distance leaves room for an area of what has been called 'free play' around the object of attention."* At that point, the 'object' can then *"be more easily described in different ways and from different points of reference"* (ibid). I grappled with this idea of 'distancing', of 'objectifying' for a long time and then decided on a new method of writing this chapter. Why not use an imaginary dialogue, incorporating extracts from my discarded draft? Having done so, I found myself discussing the various issues and my values in a more emotionally relaxed way. I had achieved, I believe, the requisite 'objectivity' and 'distance' I needed.

#### Explaining the 'nature' of the professional conflict I experienced

I needed a working definition of what I meant by *"the nature of a .... conflict."* By the nature of something I mean its essential qualities, its 'character.' To understand the *"essential qualities"* of the conflict I experienced at the college, I needed to consider whether it was real or fictional (Fromm, 1994: 90-94). As I understand Fromm, he considered real conflict to be my inability to emancipate myself, to be free, to take control of my own life. My fictional conflict is: do I agree to conform to what other people expect me to do or do I exercise my freedom to be myself? If I exercise my freedom to be myself I will inevitably alienate some people. If I agree to conform, I will be deeply unhappy, even miserable about my choice. The latter, my unhappiness and feeling of misery will have come about because I am no longer free!

I believe that becoming interiorly free of constraints, relating warmly with myself, and being able to control my own life would help me to achieve better relationships with others. But if I persisted in trying to open the door to 'solving' the professional conflict I experienced with the wrong key, then I would never open the door. I had to find the right key. It was like a scientific problem where if I started with a

wrong premise, the problem would be insoluble and I'd get depressed and angry. If I didn't know how I should try to find a solution I would become powerless, my actions would be futile, and I would become deeply discouraged. But when I was able to say: "*Ah, this is not the problem, my premises are wrong; this other is the problem, I can now deal with it,*" this would bring me new life because, like Fromm (1994: 92-93), I believed that:

*I may never succeed but at least this is something to work on. This is not in principle insoluble, this does not condemn me to eternal impotence, I can try to do something; I work on something meaningful rather than a fictitious problem. I think that in itself brings about an increase in freedom, in energy, in confidence, which is very important: to see the real conflicts rather than the fictitious ones.*

The real conflict then for me was about my effort to become the author of my own emancipation, my own freedom, my own ability to control my own life, connected with the way I wished to exercise my leadership 'differently.' Concentrating my energies solely on attempting to resolve 'fictional' difficulties would effect little because there was a possibility they were insoluble in any case. That doesn't mean, of course, that I didn't expend quite an amount of energy on trying to resolve my fictional conflict. I resisted and that took a lot of energy. But perhaps I needed to expend that energy in order to achieve greater emancipation, freedom, control of my own life.

But how did I perceive my fictional conflict? It seemed to me that I felt quite persistently under pressure from team members, including the former action research project leader, Cora, to conform to the *raison d'être* and *modus operandi* she had established. In addition, it seemed to me that Iris, one of our team, acted more independently than our financial situation warranted and that she actually knew the difficulty this caused. The principal of the college eventually became involved, apparently agreeing with how Iris viewed the situation.

In terms of the real conflict, as defined by Fromm (1994: 92-93), I needed to be myself, to act as myself. But how was I going to be able

to do that and at the same time ensure that the teachers for whom we as team were collectively responsible, received the requisite help they needed? My writing in this chapter tracks my progression as leader, from doubt about the wisdom of copying anybody else's style of leadership to self-acceptance and freedom about exercising my leadership 'differently' (Sinclair, 1998).

### As leader I didn't have to copy the 'traits' of others

As leader I didn't want to conform to a list of traits that others might deem appropriate to leading, managing, and organising an action research project. In fact I don't believe there is such a thing as an 'appropriate' approach. Rowland (1993: 109) seems to me to argue a similar point when he cautions that the

*bureaucratic interests in many of the so-called 'caring' professions may challenge us to prescribe professional knowledge (or skill) in terms of lists of 'competencies' (but) this reductionistic approach does not readily provide an adequate account of the abilities we use at work.*

Essentially for me, there is only my approach as I respond to people and events. I believe I don't necessarily have to fit myself within anybody else's conception of what it means to be a leader. In this I am cheered by Bennis and Nanus (1985, in Sinclair, 1998: 15) who reminds me that scholars from the various disciplines have sought to identify the ingredients and antecedents of leadership and there is as yet

*no clear unequivocal understanding .... as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders .... Never have so many labored so long to say so little."*

Nevertheless, Bennis (1993: 75) does explore the "common traits" of leaders. I read him, however, without feeling a compelling need to copy his 'traits.' He defined "four competencies" for leadership as being these: "management of attention, management of meaning, management of trust" and "management of self" (p. 78). I want to criticise them lightly and briefly, but as thoughtfully as I can in the

light of my experience.

Bennis's "competencies for leadership"

According to Bennis, I manage attention when I offer a *"compelling vision that brings others to a place they have not been before"* (p. 79). While not decrying this beautiful sentiment, it sounds somewhat egocentric to me! I am asking: does a 'compelling vision' reside only in the imagination of one person to be 'applied' presumably to all in his or her spheres of influence? Well, for me, it doesn't! For me, a 'compelling vision' arises, if at all, from 'shared' vision. *"Why should one person's vision, whether the person is chosen, selected or elected, necessarily be the guide to other peoples' actions?"* And yet I know from my own experience of the action research project and from being leader of a religious community (chapter 6) that moving towards and achieving a shared vision is exceptionally difficult. I believe now also that much of the learning about what a shared vision might begin to look like comes from engaging in the process of moving towards achieving it. I believe that is what I am engaged in here, using the process of my form of representation in this chapter, to attempt to share with my readers my vision of doing leadership differently.

With reference to his second leadership competency, Bennis writes that I can manage meaning by communicating my vision through using *"metaphors with which people can identify"* (p. 80). Metaphors with which people might identify seem like a good idea. But it apparently doesn't recognise that leaders aren't the only ones who can articulate and communicate vision - with or without metaphors! I have to say that, for myself, the vision that means most to me is the one that emerges from a process with others as we attempt to share and communicate our vision.

Bennis insists that the *"management of trust,"* his third leadership competency, requires reliability and constancy on the part of the leader. A leader *"is all of a piece"; "whether you like it or not, you always know where he (she) is coming from, what he (she) stands for"*

(p. 82).

And I manage self, according to Bennis, by knowing and nurturing my skills, deploying them effectively - and by taking risk (p. 83).

Let me comment on Bennis's two ideas, "*managing trust*" and "*managing self*." Let me take the latter first, managing self, and its connection with the idea of taking risks. Taking risks is not just for leaders. It is the *sine qua non* for all human beings, if they wish to continue living. As for myself, I wish to learn to take risks by trusting in my own judgments, to learn to rely on my own sense of fidelity to the people with whom I work and to the work in hand. Looking to others to supply it may only lead to dependency or worse, sycophancy.

In my leadership role, I wish to be independent and to help others to understand their need to be similarly independent, with a view to moving towards healthy interdependence. As leader I took a risk - the risk of backlash from my colleagues - by not allowing them to require from me a 'reliability' or 'constancy' that would lead, for me, to the emasculation of my individual gifts and talents and ways of doing things, my creativity that thrives on difference. I have always been wary in groups at efforts, conscious or unconscious, at hegemonic totalising; a tendency that for me privileges unity above the difference represented by each individual in a group.

I am chilled by Bennis's phrase regarding how I should act as leader: "*whether you like it or not, you always know where he (she) is coming from, what he stands for*" (p. 80). Why? My experience of this kind of certainty is that it may not be open to difference, to the difference represented by the other with whom I am dealing as leader. If so, it denies one of my values put so well by Levinas (1984: 58) when he says that my relationship with the other is better as difference than as unity. If I love the other I won't attempt to reduce him or her to myself.

*Am I a leader according to Bennis's list of leadership 'competencies'?*

I have difficulties then, as I see it, with Bennis's over-emphasis on certainty, but also with his prescriptive and predictive view of how leaders 'should' act. I was a leader who didn't necessarily exhibit Bennis's 'leadership traits.' Was I then doomed to failure under the terms he laid down for leaders? Maybe. But if I was to be classified as a failure, I would do so in my own terms! I knew, of course, that others who experienced me as leader would do so also! I also knew, however, that there were contextual, institutional difficulties in the college where I worked. This added a local flavour and complexity that Bennis obviously couldn't know about! I knew also that each of those I worked with was a totally different person from me, had different personality traits, perhaps a different value system and a different way of thinking and acting. A question for me was:

*"Knowing all this, how could I act in ways that valued what I knew?"*

For me, it meant that I wouldn't wish to be conformist. That is, I didn't wish to follow the leadership role practised by my predecessor, Cora. Neither did I wish to pretend to be the same, to wish to copy her. I wanted to be responsible for my own actions and to enable others to be responsible for theirs.

Perhaps Bennis's focus on leadership, is more a study about *"generic great men theories, personality traits and behavioural style theories,"* as Covey (1995: 101) puts it. In order to avoid these notions, Covey decided to study followers rather than leaders in his quest *"to assess leadership."* I feel it's a pity that he didn't study his own leadership in the process of studying the practice of leadership in the case of other individuals. Then, he and they would have been describing and explaining their individual personal gifts, talents, and experience of their practice in dealing with people and events. However, I don't intend doing a literature review of leadership, not least because it is a topic *"considered in more articles and citations than any other topic of management"* (Sinclair, 1998: 15), but also because I wished to speak about how I attempted to exercise my leadership 'differently'. By 'differently' I mean as I observed myself reflecting and acting in that role over two years (1993-1995).

For me, leadership, my leadership of an action research project, wasn't a static concept consisting of a list of ways of being leader. Rather, I had to constantly enact it, to constantly seek to accomplish it (Sinclair, 1998: 12-13). My leadership came into being in my words and actions, in whatever images I conjured up as in this artifact here, my writing, as I both explore (intrapersonally and interpersonally) and explain what my leadership was like. I needed to constantly demonstrate to myself and others what I meant by my leadership so that I was able to sustain exercising it 'differently'.

I realised, of course, that for my leadership to be 'successful', it required a partnership of leader and led. It is problematic for me as to whether that ever happened in my leadership of the action research project at the college, 1993-1995.

#### Writing this chapter anew

I explain in this new chapter what 'leadership' means to me as I understood it in my then practice as leader of an action research project (1993-1995) and as I understand it now. By moving through the events I experienced as leader I will be able to understand it more clearly.

In writing this new chapter I used extracts from the previous discarded chapter I had written and from a chapter I had contributed to a book edited by Taylor *et al* (in press). These extracts included descriptions and some explanations of the 'conflict' I experienced in my role of leadership of an action research project at the college. They include cameos of exchanges between me and members of the action research team, including Paddy, Cora who was the previous leader, Iris and the college principal. I included these cameos and extracts within an imaginary dialogue with my friend, Jim, whose questions are based on the cameos and extracts. They in turn illustrate my needs and the needs of my colleagues, my agreement or disagreement with them where personally warranted and, through

some pain, the emergence of my own sense of my own identity and integrity and of my leadership values. And so, I now enter the writing of this 'new' chapter honouring my own quest to be different, that is, to be myself. Not only honouring, but reverencing it, a quest which, for me, sounds quite like Moffett's (1994b: 19-22) view of spirituality which he says: "*work(s) through each of us in a particular way characteristic of our individuality ....*"

Before I move on to consider why I used imaginary dialogue as well as 'real' dialogue, I want to see if I can answer an objection Pat D'Arcy (a member of Bath University Action Research Group) raised when she read an early draft of this chapter. She felt that she had got adequate explanations of the meaning of my conflict and how I dealt with it through the use of my imaginary dialogue. She did wonder, though, about what she called the 'repetition' near the end of the chapter when I began to offer the 'real' dialogue involving Iris and the college principal. I did so at that point rather than earlier because I found it extremely difficult earlier to be objective about it. I thought that if I left these dialogues until near the end I could, in the meantime, offer my explanations about what else I experienced and that these would prepare me for dealing with these dialogues which were very painful to me. I also felt that I could now use them to offer a more reflexive account, building on what I had already explained in the earlier part of my imaginary dialogue leading, hopefully, to new learning.

### *An imaginary dialogue*

But why an imaginary dialogue? I agree with Dadds (1995a) above that I needed a way to help me objectify and distance myself from the trauma of the pain I experienced as I endeavoured to make sense of, move through, and become more free and in control of my own life as leader of a project at the college where I worked. I needed dialogue with my inner self which the imaginary dialogue facilitated. Let me explain.



I am creating my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation (Winter, 1998). My living theory grows from my descriptions and explanations as I am on what Winter calls "*a sort of journey of self-discovery*." This journey doesn't only involve me, it also involves others. So dialogues, both intrapersonal (with myself) and interpersonal (with others), are involved. In my intrapersonal dialogues, according to Lomax (1999:14), I am representing my meanings to myself. In my interpersonal dialogues I am representing my meanings to others. In this particular study of singularity I am using intrapersonal dialogue as a form of imaginary dialogue because I want, in the first instance, to represent my meanings to myself. Then, I want to represent my meaning to my reader through this particular text which is my form of interpersonal dialogue. This text also includes, of course, my actual dialogues with those with whom I was in conflict. But now I invite the reader to accompany Jim and myself as we move into dialogue.

*'Paddy's' aggravation at his perception that I am dilatory*

"Will you introduce me to your first cameo?," Jim asks.

"Right, Jim, turn to that sheaf of papers and read the passage (below) which begins with a journal entry."

In my journal, dated 10th November, 1993, I wrote thus:

*Had an action research meeting from 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. The person I was most aware of during the meeting was 'Paddy'. I could sense that he was very annoyed. He said: 'I have a lot of work to do. I need to know how things are going to be organised in action research, when things are to happen, etc.'*

At the meeting I believe I began to 'own' Paddy's problem - at least initially. I could have challenged Paddy about cooperation, about collaboration and that if we didn't cooperate and collaborate, the team might begin to fall apart. I greatly dislike 'either-or' situations, however. And I also know that Paddy likes order and 'discipline'. Obviously the previously ordered way of doing things, when Cora was

leader, suited him. I'm afraid I'll have to admit that I won't be able to duplicate that because I don't believe in it per se. I need to be liberated from conformity and, in my opinion, other people on this team need a similar liberation. I have to be careful though, not to force it! To do so would be undemocratic.

In the same journal extract I also wrote:

*It must have been highly aggravating for someone as highly organised as Paddy to come to a meeting and to find that we didn't know exactly how many teachers were going to be involved this coming year. Despite my pleas to Paddy for help, however, it fell on deaf ears. He tended to complain but was reluctant himself to offer help, the kind of help that might enable us to ascertain the number of teachers to be involved in the coming year.*

I sympathised with Paddy's dilemma. I noticed his complaints, too. However, there was never an offer of help, even when I asked for it. I needed help with contacting schools as I didn't have a secretary and the college admitted it couldn't provide me with one. Well, I couldn't compel an offer of help, no less than freedom. Either it was freely given or it wasn't. What felt important to me was to find a way of getting the action research project to move forward and at the same time to retain the level of freedom that I needed for myself. In the same journal extract I go on the defensive, but indicate also, that I am not going to take on a burden of guilt:

*I am reluctant to take on a burden of guilt which would affect my own perception of my own competence. Guilt would only immobilise me and make me feel useless. I do, however, find Paddy's constant refusal to be involved in contacting any of the schools very annoying.*

Feeling annoyed and feeling deprived of my own freedom to act are two different things. But I can deal with them when I don't feel guilty and when I am not made to feel guilty. Regarding Paddy, I felt he could have tried to accommodate himself to the limits of what I felt I was able to do, knowing what the institutional constraints on me were. The alternative was for him to take on some aspects of my role that he felt I should have fulfilled but couldn't. My real concern was that if I took on fully the role Paddy felt I should fulfil, I would be left

with doing more than I felt I was able to do. In that event, I felt I couldn't be true to myself, to who I know myself to be.

I felt then that there was an expectation that my leadership of the action research project would depend on me, a lone individual, and not on me as a member of an educational community. Achieving success was, I felt, going to be difficult, if not a failure. Lambert (1998: 3) puts my dilemma very succinctly when she says that:

*Schools (colleges), and the people in them, have a tendency to depend too much on a strong principal (leader) or other authority for direction and guidance.*

Rather, I wished for staff commitment to work in a way that involved reflection, enquiry, conversations and focused action - professional behaviours (p. 4). According to Louis (in Lambert, p. 87), it is certain that the best relationship atmosphere happens in an institution where there is *"high engagement and low bureaucratisation."* By high engagement she meant frequent interaction and two-way communication, mutual coordination and reciprocal influence, and some shared goals and objectives. On the other hand, low bureaucratisation meant an absence of extensive rules and regulations governing relationships. My reading of my situation as leader was that there was low engagement and a high desire for bureaucratisation.

I wanted my leadership to be about *"learning together"* (ibid, p. 5), enquiring about and generating ideas together, and making sense of our work in the light of our shared beliefs and new information. We would then be able, I felt, to create actions that grew out of these new understandings. I wanted these creative actions and new understandings to be at the core of my leadership, but they weren't. Yet, paradoxically, I knew I was able to offer leadership to the individual teachers and others I worked with, as my representation of our work together in various chapters in my thesis show. The learning that was most powerful to the teachers and to myself did not consist of *"decontextualised training,"* but learning that was embedded in the work we were doing (ibid, p. 80) as community

together.

### Jim's questions about who I perceive myself to be

Jim responds with: "What I've just read about is a live problem for me too. How do you find a way to be cooperative but not to have to conform to others' wishes? How do you find a way of insisting that you are different from those you work with and at the same time preserve a communal feeling?"

"To be honest, I didn't come up with an instant solution. It only grew slowly. But in that particular situation I wasn't at ease. I kept remembering how 'Cora', the previous leader of the project, did things. And she was present at this particular meeting which added to my leadership discomfort. Paddy wasn't the only one who was used to doing what he was told, others were too. Not only that but having things done for them too. I was determined I wasn't going to do that. Otherwise I felt I would lose sight of who I was. I wasn't sure though, how I could hold on to my own point of view, be cooperative, but also nonconformist, and still move the project forward. Not easy."

"How did you become leader of the action research project? And a more important question perhaps: 'how would you describe yourself?'," asked Jim.

"I know all descriptions and explanations need 'evidence' for their 'validity', nevertheless I attempted to answer that very question in a chapter I wrote for a book by Taylor *et al* (in press). You can read about it in that sheaf of pages by your elbow (and below)":

### My leadership style

"To enable you to understand the nature of the professional conflict I experienced at the college (where I worked, 1990-1995), I invite you to join me as I reflect on what becoming leader of an action research

project (1993-1995) meant to me. I took over as leader of the action research project at the college in August, 1993. It was an appointment made by the previous leader informally, with the agreement of the other staff members, within the department in which I worked. Because this job wasn't listed in the college 'Instrument of Governance,' it had no job description. The previous project leader, who was also leader of the department in which I worked, had a formal job description of that role. This was easily transferable to a description of her role as action research project leader. If only hindsight could be foresight, I would have sought a formal job description for leadership of the action research project! Doing so at the time might have enabled me to resolve some at least of the subsequent difficulties I experienced."

"If I didn't have a job description, I had a leadership style, however. And my style was the opposite to that of the leader I replaced. I am not authoritative in style. That is, I am not instantaneously certain about my knowing, I believe it grows and develops over time. Regarding my dealings with people, I prefer to manage the process of the relationship rather than people themselves and so I tend towards being non-directive. People rather than tasks have a higher priority with me, even though I also pay attention to the latter! I can tolerate a high level of ambiguity and a certain amount of disorder and instability. Rather than directing or controlling people, I prefer to believe that, given time and goodwill, I can enable them to become self-motivated and self-directed. As leader I wished our meetings to be more reflective than problem solving, while not neglecting the latter. I was more interested in knowing how we each facilitated the teachers we were supporting in an action research mode in the schools than in how many visits we paid to them, for example. The qualitative rather than in the quantitative aspects of the action research project were more important to me."

#### Jim's questions about my sense of my identity

Jim nods, "Okay, but I want to know how you retained your sense of

identity throughout your difficulties?"

"If you turn to the pages in that sheaf of papers you'll read more about my difficulties, but also about how I eventually came to a sense of how I might retain my sense of my identity and integrity - and about how it was okay for me to exercise my leadership differently!" Jim reads the passage below":

Writing in my journal on 24th November, 1993, I say:

*Action research meeting .... I find myself going on the defensive rather than throwing the question(s) back at (my) questioner. Yet what I think Paddy is signalling is that I am expected to have all the answers.*

Again and again I see the same temptation being held out to me:

*"become like your predecessor. That's our expectation of you."*

Admittedly, others aren't saying that to me. I'm saying it to myself.

Because I'm doing so, I have a choice. I can be myself as I am or I can capitulate and try and become Cora. She herself too, said to me at this meeting:

*You are good at drawing people out but decisions also have to be made frequently. I think you'll have to get used to using words like 'I will' rather than 'I think', or 'Maybe', etc, more frequently.*

#### Jim's questions me about being decisive

Jim tentatively asks me: "What do you think of Cora's insistence that you be more decisive. At least that's what I thought I heard her saying?"

"To be honest, I don't feel a compelling need to follow her logic nor her method. For me, it's just a choice I can take or leave! I use 'I think' and 'Maybe' as invitations to participation. I don't want anybody to feel forced to do anything they don't want to do. I want them to freely choose. Why should I insist on collective decisions, when I believe that the very insistence may militate against learning?"

For me, decisions freely arrived at, are preferable."

"Hold on a minutes, Ben," Jim says", couldn't meetings go on interminably then with no decisions ever being made?"

"Yes, that's a possibility. However, my experience is that in any group of people at least one is going to be of the decisive kind. But my experience is that the 'decisive' kinds of leaders sometimes unwittingly deprive others of feeling free in the decision being made. The compulsion to decide is not always, often even, made in a climate where I feel 'free'. The paradox for me is that while I value decision making, I value democracy much more. But for democracy to hold sway, individuals need to be free to make decisions. I can't allow people at meetings to 'force' me into doing something I don't want to do - or don't feel capable of doing."

"Considering that you have difficulty with the way decisions are made, how did you manage?"

"I've come to know that I need to meditate internally. To find ways of boosting myself internally when faced with issues that I don't appear to be easily able to solve. What you'll see me proposing on those pages near you may not satisfy you, but they were fine for me for a while until I found a better way to deal with my problems. By the way, don't feel turned off by my ideas about self-pity being positive."

Jim turns to the pages indicated in the sheaf of papers on the table and begins to read what is below:

*I grow in self-understanding through self-love*

There may be a little tincture of self-pity (Hillman, 1994: 103) in what I have been writing. If there is, all I can say is that I'm human and so, fallible. So what if I occasionally display self-pity at least momentarily? It's good for me! How so? Some of my self-pity is obviously self-justificatory and defensive, but there is also another

kind peeping through the surface. Let me explain. I want to be available to help those I am with, but that sometimes happens at the cost of my love for myself. Sometimes then, I don't feel that I want to be available to others.

The feeling side of my personality doesn't begin maybe where I'd like to persuade myself it begins - with feeling for others! Rather, it begins with self-pity, that is, with feeling for myself. I am presently engaged as I write this section in feeling tenderness for myself. Doing so helps me both to listen to and show the real care for myself, care that I need. It is the beginning of my caring deeply for myself. It is opening me up to my lost aspirations as, for example, about the kind of leadership I would like to have exercised, but perhaps didn't. It's opening me up to being regretful over wrong choices I may have made at different times, not totally sure what they were, but vaguely believing I made them all the same. It is about my discovery and revelation of my deepest longings to myself. I know what I want to show others - care and availability.

I want to know and reveal to myself my deepest, my most vulnerable parts so that I can come to an ease within myself about being messily human, not really having definite answers to my everyday problems of living and working, as with my leadership of the action research project. I want to know myself and my needs better. In knowing and owning my knowing, I won't then be waiting for judgment from others. I will instead be judging myself but doing so with some tenderness, care and love. I'm happy to start with self-pity, if that's the route I need to take on my way to self-love and love of others.

#### *Jim's questions to me about being guided by my own values*

"It seems to me since we started talking that freedom was constantly peeping through the surface of all the things I hear you saying. What does it mean to you?"



"Can I put it very simply - I need to be creative. I can't be creative if I don't have freedom. If having freedom means that I don't conform - at least at times - well then, I don't conform! And what's useful for me now is to see to what degree I have been strengthened, to what degree I am more free to control the living out of my life, a life that is not conformist. That's what's important to me. And that in the process of this discovery I haven't consciously or deliberately harmed anybody."

Jim queries me, "Do you remember you told me a lot about Isaiah Berlin's views on liberty recently. You had read some of his books and also Ignatieff's biography of Berlin. What had Berlin to say about liberty, about freedom?"

"According to Berlin (in Ignatieff, 1998: 202) there are two liberties, two freedoms, negative liberty and positive liberty. I possess negative liberty, or freedom, when I am free from obstacles to my thoughts and actions. I can achieve positive liberty, positive freedom, when I come to realise my innermost nature. On the one hand, I might enjoy negative liberty, that is, freedom of action or thought, but might lack positive liberty, that is, the capacity to develop my innermost nature to the full."

"Okay," says Jim. "I am with you so far, but are there any dangers that you can see regarding the exercise of positive freedom?"

"Yes, Berlin (1950: 171) feels that I might be tempted to consider others to be ignorant of their true natures because of custom or injustice, and that I could 'free' them because of a pretence on my part that I understand their objective needs better than they do themselves. But the kind of freedom I should offer others, Berlin insisted, is to offer to free them from obstacles like prejudice, tyranny and discrimination so that they themselves can exercise their own free choice. But offering freedom to others doesn't mean telling them how to use their freedom."

Jim interrupts, "I would imagine that achieving negative liberty, the

absence of obstacles to your courses of thought and action, became very important to you when you were dealing with your 'conflict' with Iris and the principal here in the college."

"Yes, it was. but I'll talk about that later. But I did exercise positive liberty as I worked towards enabling Marion, Valerie and Rose in chapter 2, John in chapter 3 and David in chapter 4 and myself, to develop our innermost natures to the full."

Jim replies, "Yes, I've understand that in reading chapters 2, 3 and 4 in your thesis. But to return to Berlin, what other contribution did he make to ethics?"

"He contributed to ethical philosophy through his notion of moral pluralism. Annan (in Berlin, 1998a: xvi-xviii) says that Berlin's interpretation of life *is* pluralism. He believes that you can't always pursue one good end without setting another on one side."

"Like not being able to always exercise mercy without cheating justice, for example," Jim chimes in.

"Precisely. Equality and freedom are both good ends but you rarely can have more of one without surrendering some part of the other. However, peaceful tradeoffs are possible. Sometimes, for example, equality and liberty may be reconciled; sometimes not. But Berlin reasons that pluralism *entails* liberalism or freedom."

"So Berlin's two main ideas are thus connected, freedom and moral pluralism (Berlin, 1998a: 286)," Jim chimes in.

"Yes, Berlin's moral pluralism lead him to espouse what he considered to be a comparatively new value (since the 1800's), that of toleration. And out of that grew other new values such as sincerity and authenticity. These new values form the presuppositions of modern liberal individualism (Ignatieff, 1998: 245)."

"How do you see these new values in relation to your work with

others as represented in your thesis,?" Jim asks.

"I came to value the differences between me and John in chapter 3, David in chapter 4, Iris and the principal in chapter 5. I came to learn and practice the value of toleration, thereby leading to greater sincerity and authenticity on my part."

Jim queries, "but I read, too, that Berlin (Ignatieff, 1998: 89) himself believed that positive freedom wasn't attainable. Why? Because he didn't believe in the inevitability of progress. He said that the concept of progress was unintelligible because individuals in modern societies were incorrigibly divided about the nature of the good (Eliot, 1948: 48, 70, 122)."

"That's true, but I don't accept Berlin's view of positive liberty because I believe it is the effort to achieve development of my innermost nature rather than the end result which is important to me. Even though there is variation in values across cultures and between individuals within cultures, I believe that understanding the concept of 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993: 56) helps me to move towards my development of my innermost nature, my own self-realisation. By living contradiction I mean my efforts to minimise the tensions I experience between holding personal values of freedom and love and negating them in my practice."

"May I go on just a little?"

"Please do," Jim says.

"While my understanding of my values may differ from similar values held by others, that doesn't necessarily affect me. What affects me is not my comparing my values to those of others, but my self-appraisal in terms of my idiosyncratic living out of my own values as I understand them for myself, and as they help me to act professionally with teachers and others."

"But," argues Jim, "didn't Berlin emphasise the notion of human

dividedness: that the self is torn by competing impulses; that the ends and goals of human beings are in conflict?"

"Yes, that's true, he did. Berlin used the notion of human dividedness, both inner and outer, to argue for freedom within the good society which accepts conflict among human values and which maintains a democratic forum in which conflict can be managed peacefully. If true for society, it is equally true for institutions within society. I was to come to lament the lack of a democratic forum in this college from 1990 to 1995, whereby conflicts such as I experienced, could have been managed peacefully. Berlin's concept of 'dividedness' reminds me of difference, of the differences between me and others, and how I need to work at respecting others because they are different from me."

"But now to the action research project. You must have had a view that it was going to end," says Jim.

"Yes, I have to admit that the view slowly formed in my mind that I'd have to find a way, perhaps, of doing action research on my own. That actually became possible when, at the beginning of 1995, I detected that the team was actually breaking up."

"Would you say something about how and why that happened?," Jim asked.

"Yes, turn to that sheaf of papers and read the passage entitled *"Should we expand the action research project?"* (below)

### *Should we expand the action research project?*

At a team meeting held on 12th October, 1993, we discussed the issue of expanding action research in the school year, 1993-1994. One of the questions we asked ourselves was how many teachers and schools we felt we could accommodate in the action research project in 1993-1994. Most of the team wished to accommodate as many

schools as possible. I didn't believe we could do so for three reasons:

- 1) we had fewer personnel on the team than the previous year;
- 2) I had doubts about the individual commitment of the members;
- 3) I wanted action research to be done in some depth, not just scratching at the surface; others didn't.

In the event, the action research 'good news' didn't spread much in 1993-1994 outside our existing group of schools. However, early in 1995, I began to disseminate action research in two areas some hundred plus miles from the city in which the college was located. Some thirty teachers attended the workshops I held on action research on consecutive evenings for two hours every fortnight. I felt exhilarated at the enthusiasm of those who attended. James, one of our team members, and I shared the giving of the inputs at the sessions.

*Jim's questions as to why our Action Research group broke up*

Jim asks: "On a previous occasion I understood from you that the action research team gradually broke up because of other commitments and lack of commitment to action research itself, but were there any other reasons, in your view?"

"Can I read out what I wrote about that for Taylor *et al* (in Press)?"

"Please do," Jim said.

"Here it is":

"What I hadn't reckoned with, though, was the personal stress and confusion caused to at least some of the staff by the change in leadership styles. They were faced with me, a leader whose style was the direct opposite to that of the previous leader, a very charismatic personality, who was still a fellow staff member as well as head of my

department. I soon felt myself becoming destabilised by my perceptions of the staff's dismay at the change, by my own secret lack of confidence in myself, and also by the fact that another staff member, 'Iris', began to act independently of decisions made at our meetings. Unknown to me, in her visits to school, Iris used to take on tasks for which there was no mandate from our meetings, nor money to support them. She used also to discuss with other staff members, outside of meetings, decisions she intended taking for which she had not received prior approval at our meetings. Eventually, having found out what was happening, I started worrying about the financial implications of Iris's independent decisions and how I felt her independence was undermining me and my leadership. I wondered also about how I might find a 'suitable' way to reproach her in as gentle a way as possible. In the end I never did find a way."

Jim says thoughtfully, "Yes, that was really difficult for you. But just take Iris for a moment. Weren't you expecting conformity from her, the very antithesis of what you say you wish to stand for?"

"(I laugh) Yes, you've caught me out in an apparent contradiction. However, it's a complex one and needs to be explained. Iris was the one member of our group who was formally paid. All the other members were religious brothers and Cora herself was a religious sister who only got a small allowance which went into a community account in the bank on our behalf. But Iris was paid a recognised rate of pay for the work she did from the funds we got from the Department of Education. These funds were actually very limited. The college expected me to draw my small allowance from that fund as well as Iris's salary. And the more work Iris did, the more she had to be paid, and the more my allowance went down! What happened eventually was that I lost all of my allowance and Iris was paid more! In fact, I shouldn't have had to deal with these kinds of difficulties. They should have been dealt with by the authorities in the college who employed Iris. I was left holding a responsibility without power. In fact, whenever Iris was dissatisfied she went over my head anyway to someone more powerful to get what she wanted. She clearly knew that my role hadn't any status. Okay? But could I bring us back to a

final reason why I think our group broke up?"

"Sure," says Jim, "but could I ask you something else, something that may be difficult for you to answer?"

"Try me."

Jim says, "I don't know how powerfully you feel at being rejected by Iris, but can I ask this? Did Iris have the democratic right to do things 'differently', the right you claim for yourself?"

"Rejection by Iris - I hadn't thought of my difficulties with her like that. But now, yes, I think you're right. Regarding her democratic right to do things 'differently' to me, I hadn't sufficiently thought about that either. The fact was that she made her own choices about issues that I felt should have been discussed in our work community. Whatever else I did, I didn't do anything in the schools that I hadn't cleared with our community. To do otherwise would have been an abnegation of a sort of obligation I felt to democracy within our group. Democracy, in this instance, meant that each of us would in some way be answerable for the work we did, or intended doing, to the group. Anything else is, at least for me, a recipe for chaos!"

"Tell me now about the real reason for break-up of the action research group," asks Jim.

### *The real reason for the break up of our group*

"Although our team decided in 1991 to undertake an action research project and actively did so in 1992, it wasn't unconnected with our rejection of a programme that the trustees of the college wished us to be involved in, starting in 1990. The minutes of our department meeting on 9th September, 1991, summarise those reservations. Below is a brief snippet from those minutes":

*We have serious reservations about, and resentment, at being ordered to undertake tasks that do not allow us the freedom and*

*autonomy which we feel were our professional entitlement ....*

Our reservations led, in October 1992, to our department initiating an action research project. And Cora, the project leader, wanted to prove that we could take responsibility for, and move forward, our own project. On 14th October, 1992, she told us that: "We don't have an option on involvement. We have decided to go into this as a team, to operate action research as our focus ...."

"What happened then?," Jim asks.

"With the pressure from the trustees long gone - a hazy memory at most - it wasn't surprising to me that the individual team members wished to return to the areas of their 'expertise' which drew them into the college in the first place before action research came on the scene. It now seems to me too that it was rejection of an attempted imposition by the trustees of the college, and Cora's insistence on making our action research project work at least during its first year, that bound us tightly together and made the operation of action research successful."

"Yes," Jim says, "I accept what you're saying. However, it could still be said that the project in its original form fell apart because of your lack of a thrusting leadership, a leadership that grabbed people by the scruff of the neck, metaphorically, and said: 'This is what we're going to do. I expect everybody to fall in with that.'"

"Look, Jim, can I tell you how I perceive leadership?"

"Sure," says Jim.

Here is what I wrote about it in my journal (12th November, 1993):

*I have reflected on and off about what leadership should mean to me. For me it has to have something to do with the spirit - and with people .... In my experience, 'decisive' leadership is the one that most disables and inhibits me .... one person takes all the decisions, albeit occasionally dressing it up as democracy. To me there is something very egotistical about it; a form of self-glorification. The form of leadership I favour is one where the*



*leader provides opportunities for people to experience freedom of expression and action so that they can genuinely choose between alternatives, which allows people to make mistakes and learn from them.*

Jim immediately asks, "Ben, regarding that passage, it sounds to me that your declaration of them as values came from feeling you were being denied your free expression of them."

"You're right. I have experienced leadership from various people throughout my life that I would classify as crippling. A leadership that would hold people in bondage. I have a tremendous desire to allow others to be separate from me. I don't own them. I desire to be most delicate in approaching them because of their difference from me. In order to celebrate their being different they need to experience freedom and responsibility for that freedom."

#### *Becoming concerned about the 'truth of power'*

"Can I tell you something else, too, Jim? At the college, I became seriously concerned about the truth of power and the power of truth as Foucault explains those terms (in Gordon, 1980: 131-133). When Foucault talks about 'truth' he doesn't mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted' (ibid). He actually means 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (ibid). Let me put it this way. After I left the college I wrote to the college principal some months later about the 'rules' which he had assembled to connote truth, which for me were to do with the truth of power."

Jim is puzzled", Give me a specific example," he pleads.

"Okay, Jim. Listen to what I wrote to the college principal, and to one of my community leaders (9th January, 1996). I paraphrase it in Taylor *et al* (in press) thus:

"One of my complaints was that the two consecutive college

newsletters, published after I had left the college, omitted to mention me or my work at the college! My work was, in fact, attributed to others, including the principal, though he knew nothing about action research! I felt infuriated .... I lambasted what I considered to be the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the college where, in my opinion, nothing was decided at the appropriate lower level. Everything, no matter how minute or insignificant, was apparently decided at the higher level of department head or at the level of principal .... I excoriated what I considered to be the centralisation of power and said that whenever power is centralised in a few hands, there is the danger of corruption .... The college structures weren't helping me to achieve the freedom necessary for my personal growth. Hierarchy and bureaucracy were hampering my freedom. Unless I had freedom, I had no choice. If I couldn't choose, I couldn't grow."

"My goodness, that was hard-hitting."

"It was intended to be," I reply. "I either spoke up now or was forever silent. You see, a part of me also believed what I told 'Etty', a friend (in Taylor *et al*, in press)":

*Regarding my previous reluctance to speak up perhaps yes, being a brother may have inhibited me. Perhaps I felt I should take whatever was doled out to me without complaining'. But Etty also said to me, and I've never forgotten it: 'I think it's good to stay angry, angry about the things that really matter to us .... At the same time we manage to accommodate the experience, remove the bitterness and in some way gain a different kind of peace, perhaps that's your spiritual peace?*

"So I was determined that I would from now on always question where I detected the presence of the politics of power working to the detriment of myself or others."

"I am most aiming to be myself"

Jim asks: "But what about the rest of your life? Are you just going to be rebellious? If you are, I believe that may destroy the good you can do."

"No, Jim. I'm not going to be rebellious. What I most aim to be is myself, as Merton put it (Padovano, 1984: 59). It's like what I told Etty (in Taylor et al, in press) when I said":

*I don't want to be taken for granted by anybody, even by God. Threats, or even blandishments, won't do. God has to be gentle, understanding with me. I want to be accepted, to be appreciated, not for anything I've done but because of the simple fact that I am, that I exist. And if I choose to refuse sometimes to take seriously theology, doctrine, the Bible or action research, I don't expect to be involved in stand-up rows. I want people, instead, to sit up and take notice, to be amused if they want to be. But also to know that I've said something that I'd like taken seriously, not especially because of its merits maybe, but especially because I've said it. For me it's a form of honouring and being honoured, of remembering and being remembered .... And I sincerely want to bring goodness into the world in my dealings with others.*

"I love it," Jim says, "and agree with it too."

"Could I tell you too, Jim, that Peter Taylor - for whose book I have written - in an e-mail to me (11th April, 1997) said that my writing would 'inspire others with undreamt of possibilities for renewal' when he said":

*I have .... come to appreciate something of your struggle to be authentic and alive as you inject your spiritual values into an action research which breathes a refreshing breath of life into your pedagogy. And I want you to join us in our book. To have your story there to inspire others with undreamt of possibilities for renewal. And I hope that, like Etty, my invitation pours energy into your sense of worthiness as a person and an educator. My invitation to you is couched in the spirit of celebration. In this book I want the celebration of life to burst forth and dazzle the reader with joyous anticipation of forming rich educative relationships with others. Will you join me / us in this endeavour? I hope you can.*

### Conflict

"But now tell me how did Iris become a much more powerful figure in your action research project," asks Jim.

"Let me say, first of all, that I had known for some time (from early October 1994) that Iris and the college principal had been holding 'secret' meetings. They were 'secret' in so far as I wasn't party to them, even though they were to do with action research and with university accreditation for the teachers with whom I was working. I was never told why I was excluded. But following these 'secret' meetings, the college principal began to hold unexpected, impromptu meetings with me."

"Tell me about them, Ben," Jim asks.

### Action research and some of my values

"For example, the principal requested an impromptu meeting (15th October) after he had met Iris in early October, 1994. I have no way of knowing whether this happened as a result of his meeting with Iris or was a genuine initiative of his own. Anyway, you will hear him questioning me regarding action research and my values.

*P           What is your aim in your action enquiries?*

*Ben        A number of things. I want to enable teachers to have the courage to question what they're doing and how they're doing it. When meeting them I like to take time to get to understand who they are and they, me. It is only later that we discuss, for example, the how, using Jack Whitehead's action research cycle. In a way, we try to spend time examining the why of action research; the values and what you hold and what I hold. And, how these might be contradicted in our practices. This in turn energises us anew to try and do something about that state of affairs.*

*P           What does it mean to you personally?*

*Ben        For me, it also offers me a chance to re-look at meaning, what meaning has my life? What is the great priority I would want to spend the rest of my life working at?*

*P           If that's the case, don't you think that the rest of your life is going to be one of constant disappointment?*

**Ben**      *I'm willing to face that. I want my life and those of the people I am with to be lives of quality. I'm willing to face whatever disappointments come my way for that reason.*

"Ben, do you think the principal was being cynical in saying you were going to be disappointed in trying to fulfil your vision?"

"Well, Jim, living with him in our religious community taught me that he often felt fearful perhaps of what George Bush called "*the vision thing*." For some reason it seemed to threaten him. On one occasion he said to me in my role as head of the religious community:

*don't you think your efforts to help envision the community is overdoing it? Don't the brothers have enough to contend with in their everyday work?*

There could be another explanation, too. Perhaps he wanted to find out if both Iris and I held the same view of action research, I just don't know. I would perhaps never know because I learnt that he wasn't a man who liked others to know exactly what he was thinking. Perhaps it was a technique he learnt for controlling others. I just don't know, I can only guess."

"Okay, so what was the next meeting about?"

### University accreditation

"The principal met me in January, 1995 to criticise my preparation of the necessary 'franchise' documents for our college link with a university. Iris, the principal, and myself, had all agreed some time before that it would be most desirable for our action researchers to be able to get accreditation for their research into their practice. Here is what ensued in the conversation between the principal and myself:

**P**      *It was embarrassing meeting personnel at the university. The various documents you worked on were woefully inadequate. Here we were, seeking affiliation*

*so that we would be franchised to run an M.Ed. Programme using an action research approach and our documentation was inadequate.*

**Ben** *But what was the main objection?*

**P** *For goodness sake, I don't need to spell it out! These documents seemed to indicate that we were a very large college. We're not and you knew that!*

**Ben** *Look, can I make it absolutely clear that I volunteered to work on these documents because nobody else would and my hands were tied behind my back! I was never given parameters by the authorities here. I mentioned more than once in the past that many of the structures assumed by the university to be in place were just not in place here. When I asked what I should do the answer I got was: 'oh, do your best'. A great help! And another thing: I was never encouraged - allowed would be a more correct phrase - to meet the various university authorities. Here I was, spending months working on documents not knowing the mind of those they were being prepared for! Strange, wasn't it?*

**P** *The point is that we have been embarrassed.*

"But wasn't he the principal of this college?," says Jim, "shouldn't he have been willing to take responsibility for what went wrong?"

"Well, that's what I believed, too. But more important to me was the fact that I remember especially that he wasn't enthusiastic about including measures within the documents that would have guaranteed the rights of those working in the college. I had brought this issue to his attention some months before that and his reply was:

*We don't need those kinds of measures here. We all know one another here, don't we?*

The implication being that we're all friends here, nothing could happen that would jeopardise that. I was to come to know, however, that because I had no job protection, I could easily be dispensed with. It was a dear lesson to me, one I haven't forgotten. I now believe more firmly than ever that workers have rights; that these rights should be enshrined in some form of inalienable code that can

only be broken at peril to whoever breaks it."

Jim says thoughtfully, "I fully subscribe to that! But what happened next?"

What is agreed can easily be 'disagreed'

"In February, 1995, the principal again held an impromptu meeting with me. He had 'complaints' to air and wished also to tell me that I wouldn't be going to a research conference for which I had got a paper accepted."

*P        You applied to the 'Teachers' Research Association' and got a paper accepted for presentation at a conference. It's scheduled back-to-back with Iris's. She thinks you arranged that without consulting her! She's is not happy about it.*

*Ben      That's not true. I had no preconceived idea of where my paper would be. How could I? After all, it's the first conference at which I will be making a presentation, I was preoccupied with that. Anyway, I'm not in the habit of going around sabotaging other people's efforts. Why would I?*

*P        Have you thought about the last fax sent by Iris? What do you think about it?*

*Ben      Did you notice near the end of it the following phrase of Habermas: 'in the interaction it will be shown in time, whether the other side is "in truth or honestly" participating or is only pretending to engage in communicative action'. I'm furious at the implication that I'm dishonest! I strongly suspect that all of this is being done for power reasons. Look, I don't mind who takes charge of the Action Research Project but I'm damned if I'm going to put up with being constantly undermined!*

*P        Oh, by the way, you won't be going to that conference. I will be representing the college which will pay for me only.*

*Ben      Look, I approached you some months ago asking your permission to do so. You agreed. I would not have gone ahead without the requisite permission. What has happened in the meantime to change things? Where do I*

*stand now? After all, I've got a paper accepted.*

*P Frankly, I don't know. There's only sufficient finance for one and I'm that one! But a more important problem: here are the two of you, Iris and yourself. You're both interested in action research and in working with teachers. And yet you can't get on, you can't agree!*

*Ben You know quite well that things are being done over my head without consultation. That's a recipe for chaos! There was, for example, one meeting of action researchers in the college regarding accreditation where what I had arranged was totally ignored and substituted with something else! There's now been a second meeting which I didn't even know about. It was convened without any reference to me, and I'm still leader of the action research, you know! I'd call that quite extraordinary, wouldn't you?*

Jim says, "It does seem to me that you're being upstaged, undermined, sidelined, if you like. I find the conversation quite extraordinary - if you could call it a conversation. You are first upbraided for having the temerity to coincide your paper with Iris's. Even to an outsider like me, I have to say that this sounds entirely far-fetched. It just couldn't be true, that's my reaction. I have no doubt you wouldn't dream of sabotaging anybody else's efforts. But even if you wanted to, the chances of being able to do so seem to me to be nil. And I'm really flabbergasted at how easily the principal is able to tell you that your right to go to a conference is withdrawn without any consultation. I get the impression, too, that he also seems to accept without question the implied accusation of dishonesty against you. Extraordinary."

"I notice, as before, that the principal doesn't answer your, to me, justified anger at having the form of teacher accreditation you had arranged being scuttled at one meeting and not being told about the holding of the next meeting. It all puzzles me. It really does appear to me that, in all but name, you have actually been made redundant. I could be wrong but it seems to me to be moving in that direction."

"Jim, I knew that I had been sidelined by both the principal and Iris. I knew in my heart of hearts - although I had no proof - that Iris had



received approval to bypass me and call her own meetings. I don't believe she would have done that but that she knew her actions would in some way be condoned, even if only tacitly. Like you, I now suspected it wouldn't be long before I would be officially supplanted as leader of the project. I just didn't know when it would happen. But can I bring you forward to March, 1995, when the principal told me about a complaint against me?"

"Sure."

### A complaint

"The principal, as was his wont now - an established custom, you could say - called an impromptu meeting with me in March, 1995 to tell me about another 'complaint' from a member of our college action research group."

*P        Some staff in the action research project have been complaining about you! What do you have to say to that?*

*Ben      That's the first I've heard of it. Who are they and what's the nature of the complaint?*

*P        Well, it's one, actually, but I'm not prepared to go into the nature of the complaint ....*

*Ben      I think that's unjust! On the one hand, you say there's a complaint. And on the other, you refuse to discuss its nature. I could say that this is a fabrication or that there is a hidden agenda, couldn't I?*

*P        Look, you've succeeded in getting transfer from M.Phil. to Ph.D. Why don't you seek study leave to do it?*

Jim says, "I'm getting used to the pattern now. The principal baldly challenges you and puts you on the defensive. When you return the challenge he either doesn't answer, qualifies what he has said, or changes the subject."

"That's right. And the purpose of all these meetings became clearer at

this meeting. There was a juxtaposition between 'A complaint was made' and 'Why don't you get free to do your Ph.D.?', suggesting polite dismissal, if you like! Without being paranoid about it, I believe Iris had taken over in all but name. However, I also believe that even the principal may have felt somewhat guilty at the prospect of having me around, witnessing my own demise and so he suggested a way of off-loading me with apparently clean hands."

"Look, Ben," says Jim, "I don't like bringing this up, but in fairness, I must. Couldn't I say that this whole scenario was just a figment of your imagination, a symptom of a persecution complex?"

"I actually think that's a fair point. No, it's not a figment of my imagination. I don't particularly feel that I am being persecuted. However, I do believe that if you asked the principal, he could confirm the dates on which he met me. Not only that, but I know that he hadn't met anybody else on the staff as frequently as he met me. I checked that out. It's also a fact that some members of our action research group noticed that Iris had indeed begun to hold meetings with teachers independently of me. So something different from the established norm had begun to happen. That's all I can say."

Jim asks, "How did you react to the idea of resigning from the college and doing your Ph.D.?"

"On the one hand, to be honest, I had been greatly angered by what appeared to be the drip-drip war of attrition against me and if I left the college I felt I would somehow be admitting 'culpability.' On the other hand, leaving would be a way of 'solving' the plethora of complex difficulties with which I had been faced and to which, at that time, I couldn't see a resolution that would do justice to me. However, I decided to leave, and did so on 5th May, 1995. I didn't expect to be involved with the college again. That, however, changed in December, 1996. I will tell you what happened."

*The negotiations turn out to be 'discussions'!*

"In December 1996 the principal canvassed me about taking up a job as academic coordinator of the university Master's research programme located there. I accepted his overture coolly but in a not unfriendly fashion. I suggested a series of negotiations."

"What kind of negotiations did you want?," Jim enquires.

"I mainly wanted to see if I could negotiate what would satisfy me in terms of academic freedom if I were to take the job, knowing at the end that I am now worth more than I ever thought I was. I wanted to protect my independence, my hard-won level of self-esteem, and my desire to be appreciated."

"Okay, so what happened?," queries Jim.

"In what I took to be mutual negotiations (nine letters exchanged, January-April, 1997) with the principal of the college about the job of academic coordinator of a Master's research programme, I made four requests":

- 1) job definition and description;
- 2) job protection;
- 3) negotiations that would satisfy me in terms of academic freedom;
- 4) that *"we continue to create an open, honest and transparent dialogic relationship."*

"How did your negotiations with the principal move forward?"

"They didn't! Writing to the principal (5th April, 1997), I said that I now realised that no negotiations had actually taken place. Here's what I said to him":

*It is with no little sadness and without animosity of any kind that I am now saying that I will not be a candidate for any job nor accept a job offer that may arise now or in the future at the college.*

"What was his reply?"

"Replying to me (11th April, 1997), the principal said that we had not got *"to the point where we would have been negotiating on a job offer."* He had obviously forgotten that he had, in fact, initiated negotiations with me when he spoke to me in December, 1996. Now, however, he categorised what had been happening as *"discussions,"* and thanked me *"for your willingness to engage in (them)."*

"Ben, that was very disappointing, wasn't it? What I'm curious about is this: would you really have taken the job if it materialised and if the conditions were right?"

"You've put your finger on it there at the end, Jim, - the conditions. I couldn't have gone back unless the conditions I had asked for were fulfilled. If I had gone back without this guarantee, I would have betrayed my own strong sense of my own identity and my need to maintain my integrity. I just couldn't do it. I had spent so much time coming to know who I really am, building myself up through trying to live out my values. I couldn't just throw it all there as if it meant nothing. A job, you see, isn't the crucial thing for me. Action research isn't either. What is crucial is my sense of my identity and of my integrity. I cannot allow anybody to remove them now, to persuade me to betray them, they're just non-negotiable."

### Some interim conclusions

Now I come to some interim conclusions below in two parts. The first is entitled *Derrida and my uncertainty* and the second is entitled: *To enable me to create community I need to change myself*, in which I talk about coming to terms with who I am with Jim again partnering me in an imaginary dialogue.

#### 1. *Derrida, and my uncertainty*

I am not a devotee of certainty, of final once-and-for-all meanings. For example, commenting on my style of leadership and, indeed, on some of who I am as a person, I said in Taylor *et al* (in press) that: "*I am not authoritative in style. That is, I am not instantaneously certain about my knowing, I believe it grows and develops over time.*" I go to some lengths to show that, perhaps unconsciously, I wish to be more certain. However, my particular way of doing that is to deconstruct what others say about leadership. And that's what I proceed to do in the early part of this chapter. In doing so I use Derrida's ideas to help me to deconstruct Bennis's work on leadership. And like Derrida, I, too, accept that meaning is provisional, is uncertain, that it is never exhaustive. And in using both Derrida's and Bennis's ideas in their work for my own purposes, I believe that though their texts can illuminate my account, my account can never be reduced to an analysis of their texts.

But let me now show how I treat a particular writer's work - Bennis. I peel away layers of his constructed meaning. In doing so, I insert my own on the back of his prescription. And continuing to peel away more layers of Bennis's certainty I come to another of my own temporary meanings. Each subsequent layer moves me beyond my previous understanding. That is the sense in which I understand for myself Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction'. I use it as a strategy in my own way to suit my own purposes.

Derrida (In Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995: 77-81) waged war against the Western tradition of rationalist thought. In particular he targeted Western philosophy's central assumption of Reason which was, in his view, dominated by a "*metaphysics of presence.*" In his view, Reason pursued certainty (a determination of being as 'presence' in essence, existence, substance, subject. etc.) dishonestly, which he diagnosed as logocentrism. For him, logocentrism derived from the Greek logos, "*the word by which the inward thought is expressed,*" or "*reason itself.*" Logocentrism, according to Derrida, wished for a rational language that perfectly represented the real world. Such a language would guarantee "*presence,*" would guarantee

that whoever spoke it could do so with complete certainty. "*Words would be the Truth of things*" (p. 78). There would be pure communication with the world. Derrida, of course, made no secret of the fact that, for him (in Kearney, 1986: 116), the centralising notion of presence, of being, was never itself anyway, that the categories of an original presence were never more than substitutes of their own absence. And these substitutes were illusions to preserve the pretence of self-possession, power and authority. According to Derrida, when we put deconstruction to work we will find out that there never was a centre. I don't accept that there is no centre. For me, there is a centre, a centre which contains my values of freedom and love, authenticity and integrity.

I do accept, however, that there is no word that I, Bennis, or indeed, anybody else, "*whoever spoke it could do so with complete certainty.*" In the sense that our certainty would lead to "*pure communication.*" I know from my dialogues with Iris and with my college principal, with others on the action research team, too, that much of our dialogues was fractured. Our communication was of an 'I-It' variety. We couldn't seem to make ourselves heard by one another. Part of the reason may have been that there was an attempt to repress "*what wasn't certain,*" "*what didn't fit in,*" what was "*different.*"

Derrida issues dire warnings about the evils of such repression when he says that attempting to realise a pure form of communication could become a nightmare. The certainty of reason could become a tyranny which could only be sustained by the evils of repressing or excluding what is uncertain, what doesn't fit in, what is different. Reason, in such a scenario, could be shown to be indifferent to the other.

And yes, I believe that to some extent that happened to me. Some people, in their desire to make me conform, to fit their view of 'reason', showed total indifference to me as a person. Derrida has, I believe, some cause for being outraged at such a form of reason, of certainty, when we remember the shameful history of atrocities committed by rationalist Western culture, for example, the

systematic "rationality" of mass extermination in the Nazi era, and the Hiroshima holocaust.

On a far lesser scale of course, I too am outraged by the way I was treated at the college of education because I didn't conform, because I refused to accept the 'rationality' of certainty, of fitting in, because I persisted in being different. It took me time to learn to use my voice, to insist that what was happening in my case was "*wrong*." Then, in retrospect, I began to take action. I mainly wrote telling various people that I objected to what they had done to me. I "*spoke truth to power*" and have continued since to do so. It has been a great learning experience for me.

Derrida believed that it was incorrect to suppose that anything reasoned is ever universal, timeless, or unchanging. Meaning or identity (including my own) is provisional or relative because, according to him, it is never exhaustive. It can always be deconstructed or traced further back to prior differences. Let me explain "*difference*" or, in Derrida's terms, the word "*differance*." To explain it I need first of all to understand that deconstruction is for Derrida a strategy for revealing the under layers of meanings "*in*" a text that were suppressed or assumed in order for it to take its actual form, in particular the form of certainty, of "*presence*." And so, texts aren't unitary but include what runs counter to the assertions being made and/or my intentions as author. The meaning I am looking for includes "*what is*" (identity) as well as "*what isn't*" (difference). And so I can easily see that meaning is constantly being "*deferred*," I never fully achieve it. In order to combine this double process of difference and deferral, Derrida coined the word "*differance*."

Let me apply now Derrida's notions of difference and deferral or, more correctly, "*differance*," a notion of contradiction, to my deconstruction of Bennis's "*four competencies*" for leadership. And deconstruct them in Derrida's terms of "*what is*" and "*what isn't*." Bennis's concepts are all about "*what is*," that is, the certainty he holds about how a leader "*should*" manage. I try to tell what Bennis suppresses or assumes in order for him to be able to construct a text

of certainty. For me, the suppressed parts are within me as I read his text. They articulate my values, for example, I want a shared vision, not the vision of one person! The notion of sharing is one resonance for me of community that I mention in chapter 6. Bennis's notion of managing my self isn't necessarily to do with managing my skills as he supposes. For me, it is to do with what Sinclair (1998: 12-13) calls enacting my leadership, seeking to accomplish it. It comes into being in my words and actions, in my images and in my retrospective writing.

I have to consider the under layers of meanings that were suppressed or assumed by me in relation to Pat D'Arcy's (my critical friend) recent question to me about *"failure."* On reading an early draft of this chapter, she said: *"You failed, didn't you?"* I have suppressed the meaning of that. I haven't considered it, even though it was an unsaid question in my head. Pat said it for me and it needs an answer. Because Pat didn't qualify what she meant by failure, I have to do it for myself. It's better that I do so because I want to be guided to the greatest extent possible by own self-set *"performance indicators."* Let me seek some help for the meaning I attribute to failure. One of the characters in Peters and Waterman (1986: 223), says of failure: *"you've got to be willing to fail,"* adding that: *"You need the ability to fail" (and) "to accept mistakes."* A vital observation about failure is this: *"it's a lot less punishing with regular dialogue."* There can be a *"what is"* and a *"what isn't"* about failure. For me, the *"what is,"* the certainty, is revealed if there is only one way of considering *"failure."* If, for example, it's about somebody unilaterally deciding what the rules of failing are for me. I have to do so for myself in order, among other things, to deny guilt a place in my psyche. Not to do so would be irresponsible on my part. Anyway Pat decided to enlighten me, or at least she didn't tell me what the rules of failure were. And yes, because our action research group at the college broke up, that was failure of some kind. But it was a shared one I believe. If we were unable to communicate in a way that recognised difference, yes, that was a failure. If the principal and Iris couldn't communicate with me in a way that was other than negative, and sometimes apparently neutral, yes, that was a failure. When I didn't



Speak out more trenchantly against what the principal and Iris did to me, yes, that was a "*failure*" too.

When Derrida was accused of irrationalism and relativism, he asserted that he wasn't against reason, only its dogmatic representation of itself as timeless certainty. He pointed out that he saw nothing as being less real for being cultural or historical, but there was, in his estimation, no universal or timeless reality against which it could be compared. And it wasn't that there are an infinite number of meanings available to us; no, it's only that there is never just one. Against the accusation that everything is of equal value, Derrida asserted that it is a question that must remain open. And this is what I am attempting to do in my conclusions here, asserting that there isn't only one meaning, one answer to whatever questions are asked. And it is okay, at least for me, to sometimes refuse to make decisions on the grounds that what I decide now will so easily quite soon have to be changed again. It is not that everything is "*undecidable*," it is just that decisions, in my view, should never be made with the intention of lasting for all time.

While I have found some of Derrida's idea helpful, I believe that his deconstructive critique must itself be subjected to critique out of ethical respect for the other. Unless I am prepared to submit deconstruction to the test of ethics I won't be able to prevent it dragging me into an apocalyptic nihilism. Perhaps its greatest error is that it tends to eclipse the ethical dimension. Its endless play on difference, and so on, is open to question when we consider what Levinas called the face to face relation (Kearney, 1984: 364-366), that is my responsibility to the other. Behind and beyond the words, beyond the text a face resides: the face of the other who will never let me be. I can't renege on my responsibility to the other. I have to see beyond the danger of paralysis in the post modern. It is the everyday claim of the face to face, revealed in all my studies of singularities in this thesis, that helps me to discover the still small voice which bids me continue to search for a more perfect ethics of love towards the other.

To some extent this chapter has resembled a *"victory narrative"* (McClure, 1996: 273-286). But I have also considered it as *"ruin"* (Lather, 1994, in McClure, 1996: 273-286), if only temporarily. I accepted risk and uncertainty as *"the price to be paid for the possibility of breaking out of the cycle of certainty that never seems to deliver the hoped-for happy ending."* I agree with McClure, however, that if I abandoned my search for singularity and for explanation, I wouldn't be able to address the concern that motivated my writing of this chapter. That was to do with exploring and explaining a professional conflict I had experienced and how I came to a resolution that at least partly satisfied me. If I had wholly embraced the concept of *"ruin"*, and Derrida's notion of deconstruction in its totality, I would have remained *"on both, and neither sides"* (ibid), and found myself in an abyss of paralysis.

## 2. *To enable me to create community I need to change myself*

According to Friedman (1976: 43), Buber felt that community could only be founded on changed relationships between people, and that these changed relationships would follow because of *"the inner change and preparation of (those) who lead, work, and sacrifice for the community."* But it is a task not only for leaders who are helping to determine the destiny of communities, but for me too who, though no longer a leader, wants to be responsible for my relationship with those I meet. A part of my *"inner change and preparation"* is my effort to grow in self-knowledge and self-understanding (Au and Cannon, 1995: 3). Two imaginary dialogues help explain who I am becoming. The first is entitled: (a) *Becoming More Myself*, and the second: (b) *I Accept 'Where I Am' in Life*. Below is the first imaginary dialogue:

### (a) *Becoming More Myself*

Jim      *What are some significant things you've found out about yourself since you embarked on your spiritual journey?*

Me      *I have found out that I am an optimist, "convinced that*

there is far more good than evil in people ...." (Padovano: 1984: 8), and that despite the 'conflict' with others that I described earlier in this chapter. I have become aware of my desire for relationship with others which facilitates my intimate contact with my God. Indeed I cannot now truly find God any other way. My optimism, my hope, isn't based on reason or calculation but on the possibilities and potentialities within me and others.

**Jim**      What is the nature of your independence?

**Me**        Because I am different, as every human being is, I need to get that accepted by others. Without acceptance of difference, that of others and mine, I believe it is very difficult to create community. Without respecting and being respected, I believe the creation of community is similarly hampered.

**Jim**      But how have you followed through on independence?

**Me**        I wrote recently to one of the officials in my religious community regarding my need for independence, but also agreeing to be accountable. In my letter to him (11.11.98) among other things I said:

"I want to be accountable, to answer, for what I do and I think it is possible for me to be able to do so without being controlled. My strong sense of my own identity and dignity would not allow me to be controlled by anybody now ...."

**Jim**      Fair enough. It's about being assertive really, isn't it?

**Me**        Yes. To be self-accepting I need to be assertive (Powell, 1989: 13-14). I have to assert my right to be taken seriously. I did not do that sufficiently at the college of education where I worked between 1990 and 1995. I now accept that I have a right to think my own thoughts, as I am doing here. I also have a right to make my own choices. I enter relationships only as an equal. I do not want to be an underdog. I don't want to retreat from assertiveness in case I might be wrong. I don't wish to bury my opinions, to refuse to make known my preferences. Because I want to be joyfully self-accepting I am challenged to be assertive. In doing so I am respecting myself and expressing myself openly and honestly. It is part of my striving for integrity, for wholeness.

**Jim**      But there are two facets to your personality, aren't there, the warm and the assertive? Would you talk about them?

- Me** Yes, you're right. My self is not a seamless robe of sameness. It embraces difference within me. The difference shows itself occasionally in the two different faces I show to others - the joyful, the humorous, the warm, but also the wild and the angry. If I am unable to be assertive, contentious and fractious as well as being both warm and humorous, I don't believe I will be able to understand issues involving injustice towards me - and others. Bly (1990: 146-175) helps me to explore the wild part of me. It is connected with what Bly calls "my inner warrior." I have had to develop that.
- Jim** Please explain what you mean by your inner warrior.
- Ben** My inner warrior is not unlike the mythical Irish Fianna warriors who defended Ireland's borders. They stayed out all spring and summer watching the boundaries, and during the winter came in. I live both inside and outside my psychic house. When inside, I deserve the right of sovereignty. If I have no sovereignty, I must be worthless. If my sovereignty and my boundaries are not respected by others, their disrespect seems to me overwhelming proof of my inadequacy. If my boundaries are constantly invaded, my inner warrior dies, and even if revived, quickly dies again.
- Jim** So how do you preserve your inner warrior?
- Ben** My inner warrior is strongly built up, alive and vibrant when I respect myself and others. And it isn't only a guardian of my boundaries, of my territory. It is also a disciplined warrior fighting for a cause beyond myself, which is at least partly about my living engagement with my God, enabling me to author my own life as I relate educatively with others. My inner warrior guards the boundaries of my spirituality, a spirituality which embraces both a dovelike and a toothed part of my soul, a hopeful, joyful part and a necessary hostile, contestatory part.
- Jim** Yes, Ben, I believe I understand you more clearly now. Do you mind if I change the topic here and ask you about communication? It strikes me now when I think back over your 'dialogues' with Iris and the principal - if they could be called dialogues - how little real communication there was. How do you account for it?
- Me** I can't, I'm at a loss. It sounds like something Buber said (1957: 5), if I can remember it rightly. It went something like this:

*"If I meet others with a double glance, an open one which invites fellowship and a secret one which conceals my conscious aim, I am poisoning the springs of life."*

*Unless I was fully present to both Iris and the principal, and they to me, then there was no true communication. I admit that I knew we weren't 'present' to one another in any of the dialogues presented in this chapter. There's little doubt in my mind, there was never an 'I-You' meeting between us. It couldn't happen because none of us could speak to each other with our whole being. I-You is about relation and being together. And, crucially, it means each of us remaining ourselves, which really means being different from one another. I experienced myself being treated as another 'I', which means that the other in the 'dialogue, didn't really see me as other than a projected image of themselves (Friedman, 1976: 61).*

**Jim**      *It was rather like an I-It mode, wasn't it?*

**Ben**      *Yes. Here we were speaking to one another in an 'I-It' mode. It was a mode totally lacking in mutuality. I have to admit that I did experience being spoken to as if to an 'It'. I'll make no effort to hide that. I am aware too that in seeing Iris and the principal through an 'I-It' mode, I wasn't seeing them as whole persons either. I was seeing only part of them. Although I would have preferred to meet both of them in an I-You mode I may, paradoxically, have achieved it if I had more often been assertive, stood my ground in our 'conversations', insisted that what they were saying was unacceptable. They and I could only change, if at all, if they respected me, and I them. In any case, I realise that the building of community in these circumstances is impossible. Each of us would have needed to attend to one another's individual differences, a prerequisite for community to come into being!*

**(b) I Accept 'Where I Am' in Life**

**Jim**      *Do you accept where you are in your life right now, in the sense of your spirituality?*

**Ben**      *Yes, my spirituality isn't about ambition, promotion, achievement or my success. Rather, I am wanting to be content, tranquil, at peace with myself and with others. In a way it reminds me of Larry, whom I talk about in chapter 6. He was at peace, I believe, because he had*

*let go of ambition and promotion, and in the process, acquired peace and tranquillity. I want that, too, a peace and tranquillity I can offer to others. To acquire it, though, I believe I have to let go.*

**Jim**      *So what do you mean by letting go?*

**Me**        *It is about trying to simplify my spiritual life. If you now asked me for my definition of truth (even though I hate giving definitions!) I would answer: simplicity! The opposite of simplicity, or truth, is artificiality, which I would now characterise as a lie. I'd like to think I am really attempting with as much sincerity as I can to live my everyday life with more wisdom than I've been able to do up to this. I can only do that by letting go of ambition, of achievement.*

**Jim**      *Is that where silence fits in, too?*

**Me**        *Yes. I'd like to think of it this way. I have real silence when I am not too eager and anxious to be heard speaking. I'd like my silence to be an invitation to others to speak. Of course I didn't always like my natural stance of silence. I was afraid others would see it as taciturnity or that I really had nothing useful to say. Neither did I want to be wordless. That would only be burdensome to myself and maybe to others too. I don't want my silence to be construed as being hostile, threatening or unsettling. I want it to be creative and liberating. I want it to invite an I-You form of communication and to help foster it. I want whatever silence I possess to help bring peace to others, a silence that is more interior now because I am beginning to be at peace with myself.*

### **More conclusions**

I began this chapter by talking about the nature of the professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at the college of education where I worked (1990-1995). As leader I had to make a decision about whether I would conform to what was expected of me or seek my freedom through nonconformity. In opting for the latter I attempted to bring about what Cooper, following Buber called an 'open confrontation' with long-established ways that had, in my view, become "*adverse to the emergence of new meanings*" (Cooper, 1990: 156). Through articulating my thoughts and words

and by modelling nonconformity, I confronted what I observed to be the "*long-established*" norm of staff members being overly dependent on the leader. By being nonconformist I disappointed my new colleagues, but it invigorated me, helping to preserve my freedom and independence.

I considered early in this chapter Bennis's list of competencies for my leadership role and decided that I didn't want to become locked into his prescriptive and predictive way of how leaders should act. I felt I had to conduct my leadership in my own way; I would constantly have to enact it, constantly seek to accomplish it (Sinclair, 1998: 12-13). In that way I could exercise my leadership 'differently' (ibid). Following Blackmore (1994: 93-129), I agree that a radical shift of thinking in re-conceptualising leadership is necessary. That power and control over other people needs to be re-defined so that those in leadership roles empower from the centre, rather than use power over people in leading from the front. I regret that in my exercise of power as leader, I didn't seem able to find a way of empowering my colleagues, even though I did so 'from the centre'. I was, successful at least to some extent, however, in being able to do so with the teachers with whom I worked.

Following Hall (1996: 146-149), I tried giving up some control, I tried to encourage self-expression in my colleagues at the college. I tried modelling commitment, in order to empower them. That didn't work either. Why not? I theorised, though I can't substantiate it to any great extent, that the problem may at least partially have been how my colleagues viewed their vow of obedience as members of the same religious congregation to which I belonged. I had noticed that some of them as followers expressed this vow in being sycophantic, others in insisting as leaders on telling their followers what to do. For me, however, my vow of obedience is not about obedience, it is for partnership, according to which I don't wish as leader to tell others what to do, nor be persuaded to conform to their expectations.

Regarding my experience of powerlessness at the hands of the principal of the college, I don't now know what I could have done

about it short of resigning my position. And that is what I eventually did. He didn't seem to me to be able to 'empower from the centre'. Perhaps I could have helped him if I had been able to tell him how his exercise of leadership affected me. But I didn't, perhaps because I didn't feel sufficiently self-confident to do so at the time.

What else did I learn in retrospect? I learnt how it feels to be a stranger. I learnt from Shabatay (in Witherell and Noddings, 1991: 138) that a stranger is one who seeks that their personhood, personality, ways of thinking, feeling and acting be honoured. But the community, fearing the stranger, is already a community of affinity, where every member conforms to internally established norms. Within such a community, gradually and often silently, personhood, difference, and dialogue is suppressed, to be replaced by security, allegiance, and 'like-mindedness'. A stranger could become a guest, but to become a member they would have to mimic the ways of the members. I didn't want to be a guest - a guest always leaves. I wanted to be a member - a member usually stays. But I didn't mimic the ways of the members because I didn't think I had to. I didn't conform because I didn't think I had to. I don't know when it happened, but gradually and silently, my personhood was denied; my differentness went unnoticed; my words went unheeded. I learnt I was an unwelcome guest; my departure, when it came, would go unlamented; my help to teachers would go unreported. I finally knew in March, 1995, that I wasn't a member. I knew I was being asked to leave the community. I knew when the principal politely said to me: "*Why don't you seek study leave to complete (your Ph.D.)?*"

Nevertheless, I still want to establish educative and spiritual communities. Communities of otherness that welcome strangers, that help create divergent points of view, that are quite like the ones that Friedman (1983: 135) recommends when he says:

*What makes community real is people finding themselves in a common situation - a situation which they approach in different ways yet which calls each of them out. The very existence in genuine community is already a common concern from within the actual people present. Only then does it extend to gather other people in and then to dialogue with other communities.*



In this chapter I use a set of three imaginary dialogues: the first to help me objectify and distance myself from the trauma of pain I felt at being rejected as leader, rejected as a member of the community. It was a useful dialogue in that it enabled me to talk to my inner self and so enabled me to improve my understanding and, hopefully, my subsequent practice.

The second imaginary dialogue, *"Becoming More Myself,"* shows that I am learning to be an optimist despite adverse treatment; that I still want to create relationship with others though I am different to others. I show my new-found independence by telling those to whom I'm accountable that I do not wish to be controlled, that my sense of my identity and dignity won't allow it. I show that I do have an 'inner warrior' that appreciates being assertive. I comment on the fact that my relationship with Iris and the principal was not an I-You relationship because none of us *"could speak to one another with our whole being."*

In the third imaginary dialogue, *"I Accept 'Where I am' in life,"* I admit that ambition or promotion are no longer important to me. Rather, I want to become tranquil and at peace with myself for the sake of others. That silence helps me to invite an I-You listening form of communication, and helps bring peace to others. I am now reminded of its quality by a recent acknowledgement (January, 1999) from Kath Green (lecturer in education, Nottingham Trent University) who said the following about me:

*In 1994, I attended the 'World Congress on Action Research, Action Learning and Process Management' (at the University of Bath) where my host group leader was Ben Cunningham .... We discussed our work during the conference and found that, despite our very different backgrounds and religious beliefs, we shared much in common in relation to personal values and educational commitments. We have corresponded on a regular basis ever since. In writing to Ben, I have been able to express some of my deepest concerns about various aspects of my professional life and in particular explore some of the more tentative feelings about the way my inquiry was progressing. His letters have provided a rich source of intellectual and emotional support together with the most self-affirming feeling that comes from being truly, deeply and*

*most attentively heard.*

Though I didn't comment in this chapter on the importance of my educative relationship with teachers and with people like Kath Green, I wish to do so now as part of my overall learning from the development of my thesis. I saw the *raison d'être* of my leadership of the action research project at the college as a vehicle through which to enable teachers to improve what they were doing. My representations in chapters 2 through 6 of my educative relationships with teachers show that I succeeded at least to some extent in doing this. The various teachers I was helping with their enquiries vouched for it in the various ways I indicated in the chapters mentioned.

The intellectual and emotional support I offered the teachers, together with self-affirmation in order to make Kath "*most attentively heard*," is echoed in what I said of my educational intention towards Marion in chapter 2 (end of section one), and others, too. It is to do with a care that works at trying to find out the gifts and qualities of others and commenting on them positively. "*I do it*," I said, "*not just because I believe it's the right thing to do. I do it because I feel very strongly that others are in constant need of appreciation, as I am myself.*" That kind of support, I believe, enabled the various teachers I worked with to move into their own enquiries, feeling encouraged that they could do something to improve what they were doing. Of course, my support waxed and waned between encouraging and telling. I have often felt, at least initially, like Evans (1997: 275) felt when she says that:

*I was struggling with .... what I felt was a giving away of control and a worry that, if I did not tell the teachers what to do to improve their practice, they would not know what to do.*

That was true of me at times in relation to John (chapter 3) and David (chapter 4). However, I did eventually move to the point where, following Evans (*ibid*),

*I knew that I did not have answers for everyone and that if only they could find their own, they would be so much more motivated*

*to try them out. And that is what happened.*

Like the teachers Evans talks about, the teachers I was helping found their own answers to their own concerns.

So it is only now in this chapter that I feel I do have a growing understanding of what educative relationships mean to me in my work with teachers. I now know that I stand for *"the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which (I had) .... dedicated (myself)"* (Van Manen, 1990: 18). The 'notion' I am referring to is how my living engagement with my God is enabling me to author my life as I interweave my values in my educative relationships. I am committed to doing this through improvisation, as I bring about my own self-realisation. I know that some uncertainty is necessary for my development. I know that it enables me to be vulnerable, and even humble, as I wait for the teachers and for my fellow religious to answer their own concerns by accepting liberation through their own improvisatory research, and not through my answers to their concerns.

I am delighted that in working with teachers, I have been involved in *"the act of affirming, of entering into someone's thinking or perceiving"* (Elbow, 1986, in O'Dea, 1994) in order to help them, if necessary, to step outside societal norms and expectations. Doing so helped the teachers with whom I worked to be better able *"to voice honestly and truthfully their perceptions of events and happenings that occurred in their classrooms"* (O'Dea, 1994: 99). Of course, I know too that I felt a need as leader of an action research project *"to step outside (the) societal norms and expectations"* held by my action research team colleagues about how I should act as leader. Doing so was crucial to my need for freedom, independence and creativity, a need that I felt I couldn't satisfy authentically in any other way.

I am committed to continue working with teachers and with my fellow religious. Following Evans (1997: 280), I wish to work with them to encourage the sharing of experiences, thoughts and feelings about those experiences. I wish to work to create an environment where each teacher and religious feels comfortable, where trust

between me and them is carefully built up and where sometimes at least private thoughts are shared, so adding to the knowledge base each possesses. I believe I succeeded in activating my leadership mostly through, 'relationship' (Hollingsworth, 1994: 77-78).

It is through relationship that I come to know myself and about myself. It is through relationship that I come to know my fellow teachers and religious. It is through relationship that I come to know the situations in which I work. It is through relationship that I improve myself by changing the way I think about myself. I am changing the way I think about myself by believing strongly in myself and in my capacity for enabling others, over time, to similarly believe in their own capacity to transform themselves. And finally, I know now that the 'professional conflict' I experienced at the college of education where I worked is an inestimable gift that is enabling me to bring about this transformation in myself.

#### A claim to educational knowledge

In this chapter I have been addressing, through my descriptions and explanations, the following distinct and original claim (Abstract) I make to educational knowledge:

*I show how my leadership comes into being in my words and actions as I exercise my ethic of responsibility towards others.*

Some months after I wrote this chapter I realised that in writing it I had answered the title-question of the chapter in a way that satisfied me, but had made no reference to the knowledge claim above that I also associated with this chapter.

My strong feelings of anger at being denied my values of dignity, respect and freedom, and the fairness I associate with care, had blinded me to the fact that I was also exercising "*my ethic of responsibility*" towards the teachers I was supporting in their action research enquiries. In retrospect, I now recognise that this was a balancing factor in helping me to come to grips with the issue of my

chapter title-question: *"How do I explore the nature of a professional conflict I experienced as leader of an action research project at a college of education and come to an understanding of how to resolve that conflict as I exercise my leadership differently?"* As I was offering acceptance, affirmation and confirmation to the teachers I was supporting in their action enquiries, so I was being supported by them in turn, thus bolstering my strength and courage to face my various leadership 'conflicts'.

My perception of the collusion between Iris and the principal of the college, eventuating in the principal holding unscheduled meetings with me, gradually led me to accepting the 'rightness' of my feelings of anger at being denied dignity, respect and freedom; being denied fairness which, for me, is a sign of my love for others and for myself. Fairness was a symptom of the care I felt towards others. Care was one of the values, together with freedom, that was a factor in how I conducted my educative leadership and in how I wrote about it.

I became aware again (as in chapter 4 and in other chapters) that my "I" existed as a living contradiction, holding values but experiencing their denial at the same time as I was asking myself questions of the kind, *"How do I improve my practice?"* and *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"* It led me to writing a poem, in which I make a passionate declaration about how I understood my '*comparatively powerless position*,' as leader of an action research project. The poem also shows how determined I was that the teachers I was helping with their enquiries would experience from me what I felt had been denied to me: dignity, respect, freedom - and fairness as an aspect of love.

*In my comparatively powerless position  
I knew I was not seen as real;  
Was not seen as unique.*

*I felt valueless;  
Defined by how 'similar' or 'different' I was to those defining;  
'Similar' was okay, 'different' was not.*

*I realised the power being wielded was  
Power without meaning,*

*Power without relationship.  
It was "will to power"  
that used me as a means to an end;  
An end that justified the means.  
Did 'they' know that using evil destroys?*

*I learnt to hate the "will to power,"  
Power without relationship,  
Power without meaning  
Justifying the means by the end.*

*I learnt to nourish  
the need for self-worth,  
the need for equality.  
To give to others what I was denied -  
Dignity, Respect, Love and Freedom.*

*I am learning to act out of the present  
Knowing that every person is unique  
Every situation 'new'.*

*In relationship nothing is needed except  
My presence  
My responsibility  
Me.*

My experience of having my values of dignity, respect, freedom and right to fairness denied when I was an action research project leader, helped me to answer a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self. Concerning my conduct of my leadership, did I emerge free? I became free in so far as I was able to handle my then circumstances as leader. Being free didn't necessarily mean I was autonomous (Marcel in Roberts, 1957: 304). Becoming free didn't, for example, entail me in 'action' in the sense of being able to change the 'power relations' I experienced at the college. No, but I did seek and win interior freedom, a freedom that when complemented by love, helped me, I believe, in connecting the personal with the professional in my educative relationships with teachers and others.

## **Chapter 6**

### **What is the significance of the 'living' spiritual ideas of Tom Merton and others to my action enquiry about how I relate to myself and others?**

**Summary** Merton's writings' help me in my coming to know my own spirituality, a spirituality like his which privileges experience over theology. A spirituality which opens my eyes to my own humanity and helps me to be passionate about preserving my own identity and integrity. A contemplative spirituality in which I see my relationship with God as being inseparable from that with others.

Among the others is Larry. His death in 1995 convinced me of my need to concentrate on the *"time-left-to-live."* In the second of two meetings with Professor Judi Marshall in the School of Management, University of Bath, I learn that *"unworthiness"* is merely a step on the way to my growing self-worth, my becoming responsible for my own life. My *"failure"* at Bexham School becomes transformed at a University of Bath action research meeting into *"explaining myself to myself"* in how I am living out my spiritual values in my life. My impending reentry and reaffiliation to my religious congregation is causing me to see a coincidence between my personal search for meaning and my religious congregation's search for a new corporate identity.

Macmurray's writings remind me that forming community is about learning to live in personal relations with others whom I need in order to become more myself. It involves practising the values of freedom and of equality (the latter for me meaning love). But Vanier (1993) reminds me that forming community is not free of struggle. A struggle that may very well involve making choices between my personal freedom and conscience on the one hand, and loneliness and separation on the other. Despite that, however, I accept the responsibility of keeping *"human purposes"* at the centre of all that I do. I aim to bring about education as transformative community. An

education that is *"profoundly personal .... infused with hope for humanity' and that is 'ultimately about being and becoming"* (Fielding, 1998: 12).

For me, I am best able to bring about education as transformative community by using my vows as gifts to be put at the disposal of others. Though gifts, according to Bonhoeffer (1976 in Vanier, 1993: 52), are linked to the value of love, I also link them to the value of freedom. In offering my vows then as gifts, I am bringing together my practise of the values, especially of love and freedom. I practise my values of freedom and love through a vow of chastity that is now for me, after O Murchu (1995: 102, 11, 114), a vow for relatedness, through a vow of poverty that is now for me a vow for stewardship and hospitality, and through the vow of obedience that is now for me a vow for partnership. And I offer my living out of these vows as signs of my relationship with my God and others.



### How this chapter was constructed

This chapter was written in an improvisatory way but, in retrospect, seems to me to fall into three sections as follows:

The first, entitled, Understanding myself through the eyes of Merton, deals with my efforts to understand myself through the eyes of Merton, examining issues to do with finding my 'true' identity and preserving my integrity as a person. It helps me to endorse my view of myself as an enquirer for whom nothing is closed as a question.

The second, or middle section of the chapter, is entitled, Achieving self-realisation: learning from others, and they from me. It offers ostensive meanings about my integrity and authenticity that point to my growing understanding of how I am becoming self-realised, as I am creating my own living educational theory.

The third and final section, entitled, My spiritual journey is moving me towards helping to create community, deals with the need to create community, meaning "personal relations" and "what it is to be and become," as I live out my vows for relatedness, hospitality and partnership.

#### 1. Understanding myself through the eyes of Merton

The writings of Thomas Merton and his depiction of his life through his writings have greatly influenced me. Because who Merton was and what he wrote about were inextricably interwoven for me, I need to give the reader some inkling of who he was. So I start this chapter with a brief biography before I move on to consider ideas from some of his writings and how they have influenced me in my life and work. I will alternate sections to do with Merton and with me, offering and explaining parallel themes in each section. This is how I have chosen to highlight the significance to my educational and spiritual development of my relationship with Merton and his "living spiritual ideas."

### *Brief biography of Thomas Merton*

Thomas Merton was born in France in 1915. His parents were both artists, his father a New Zealander and his mother an American. He variously lived in the United States, Bermuda, France and England before settling in the United States, where he lived for the rest of his life. He received his early schooling in the United States, France and England. When he was only five years old his mother died of cancer. During her long hospitalisation young Tom was not allowed to see her and on her death her farewell consisted of a letter brought home to him by his father! When he was fifteen his father, too, died. After a somewhat dissolute year at Cambridge, during which he was alleged to have fathered an illegitimate child, Merton returned to the United States and continued his studies at New York's Columbia University where he graduated M.A. in 1939, his dissertation entitled *Nature and Art in William Blake: An Essay in Interpretation*.

A year prior to graduation, in 1938, Thomas Merton was baptised a Roman Catholic. Three years later, in December 1941, after a considerable internal struggle over his future vocation, he entered the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. On December 10, 1968, at the age of fifty-three, he died of accidental electrocution in Bangkok after speaking to an assembled group of Western Catholic and Eastern Buddhist monks and nuns. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me start with Merton's early writing, his autobiography (1948), which had a huge worldwide circulation among Christians of all denominations - and non-Christian too. Padovano (1984: 5) says of Merton's autobiography (1948) that: *"For many Americans the spiritual quest for worth becomes a secular need for achievement or excitement."* Padovano believes that Merton in this work follows the conventions of Puritan autobiography. That is, there is a description of wanton youthfulness, an adolescent conversion that does not endure, a mature commitment to faith, and a need to give witness by a written account that is part journal, part confession and part didactic. And like Puritan autobiography also, Merton's

autobiography (1948) works to dissipate illusion and to describe worldly life in stern and hostile terms.

Merton shows that he is frightened of his own capacity for anarchy and self-indulgence and that he needs the constraint and discipline of an ordered life. While he eventually chafed under the restrictions he had originally accepted and did something to change them, perhaps the tension within him between anarchy and discipline led to him being immensely creative throughout his life. After his autobiography (1948), Merton tended to use his own experiences rather than theology and its speculations as the wellspring for his writing (Shannon, 1993: 164). In fact, he alerted us to this in the prologue to one of his books (1953: 8-9), when he says that:

*I found in writing 'The Ascent to Truth' that technical language, though it is universal and certain and accepted by theologians, does not reach the average man and does not convey what is most personal and most vital in religious experience. Since my focus is not on dogmas as such, but only on their repercussions in the life of a soul in which they begin to find a concrete realisation, I may be pardoned for using my own words to talk about my own soul.*

In the rest of Merton's' writings then, I see his preference for "experience" over "speculation," of "poetry and intuition" over "technical language." I am attracted to the idea that my writing would privilege "experience" over "speculation," "poetry and intuition" over "technical language." I believe I have indeed privileged experience over speculation, both in my revelation of my interior life and of relationships with others. I have also privileged the poetic and intuitive over technical language to a large extent, particularly in chapter 4. I have used a free-flowing style throughout my text, a style that attempts to try and tell how I see from the inside out, as it were, that also attempts to be invitatory to the reader. An over-use of technical language - enabling me to see from the outside, as it were - would have, I feel, inhibited me from highlighting the importance of my spiritual journey of self-discovery, a journey undertaken at least partially in order to help me to improve my relationships, both personal and professional, with others.

Merton himself had been pushing the importance of his own experiences for quite some time. He added in the Preface to one of his books (1949: xii) these words:

*The author is talking about spiritual things from the point of view of experience rather than in the concise terms of dogmatic theology or metaphysics.*

As a teacher educator, Merton's emphasis on the importance of experience sits comfortably with me as I am reminded of Russell's and Munby's insistence on the authority of my own experience (Russell, 1994 a&b; Munby & Russell, 1994).

Although a cloistered monk, bidden to silence for the rest of his life, Merton gradually became involved in the issues of his day. For example, in the 60's the Catholic Church held the Second Vatican Council to let in the fresh air of change and renewal. Merton involved himself in writing and talking about his view of desirable changes in the Church. On the wider stage in the 60's too, the world lived in the shadow of the atomic bomb (King, 1995: 12). Again, Merton had a view on it - one of outright opposition. It was Martin Luther King Jr's time too, a time when the civil rights movement received fresh impetus from his leadership. In that, too, Merton was involved. And finally there was the Vietnam War and the counterculture that evolved in reaction to it, in both of which Merton was a participant. However, I will not, in this chapter and thesis, be discussing Merton's involvement in either of these topics because they do not impinge on my life of spirituality, either interior or exterior.

In 1941, with unquestioned enthusiasm, Merton entered the Cistercians (Trappists), a religious order cut off from the world. Gradually his eyes were opened to his own humanity, and by the late 1950's and into the 60's, he had rediscovered that as a monk he was also a member of the human race. In a scene beautifully described in one his journals, Merton (1966: 156-157) sees his unity with the entire human family thus:

*In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that I love all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers .... This sense of liberation from the illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.*

Throughout all these changes in Merton's life, however, he continued, until the end of his life, his preoccupation with the process of finding his true identity. He is concerned also with preserving his own individuality, a necessity if he is to preserve his own integrity. Padovano (1984: 170-171) puts it this way:

*Merton was passionate about preserving his own individuality .... nothing is ultimately more sacred than the integrity of one's own spirit .... He would make his life a pawn in no system and yet would show, paradoxically, that he belonged to the world that could not own him and to the Church that could not possess him.*

I too am concerned with my identity and integrity and try to achieve them through practising the values of freedom and love in my relationships with God and others. And for me, as for Merton, my spirituality has silence as its core. For him as for me, silence is the 'place' where I achieve my own enlightenment. It is there, too, that I discover the darkness of my own mystery and where I struggle with that darkness and finally feel my mystery merging into the mystery of the God I believe in. It is there that I discover the paradox of my inner self: it is perhaps most my inner self when, even though alone, it is with and not separate from others. Like Merton too, my spirituality of silence helps me to keep intact the 'element of inner transcendent freedom, "as I grow 'toward .... full maturity ...." (1975:317). This spirituality, encompassing "an inner transcendent freedom," only gradually came about for Merton - and for me too - when he, and I too, moved away from what I would now call a "spirituality of devotion" towards a "contemplative spirituality," from a "spirituality of devotion" that privileges community recitation of rote prayers and liturgy over "contemplative spirituality."

Perhaps a Zen saying will help put the change for Merton, and for me too, in context. It is this: "When the pupil is ready, the teacher will

come" (in Shannon, 1993: 8). By that I mean that I have to wait for change to happen and change won't come about until I am ready for it. For me, the changes were on two levels at least: at the level of a gradual abandonment of a 'spirituality of devotion' in favour of a 'spirituality of contemplation' and, parallel with that, a temporary geographical change of location away from my religious community in Ireland to living on my own in Bath, England. But before I deal with these aspects of my life I want to explain first what I mean by contemplation as I understand it in the context of Merton's life and in its deep resonance with my own life.

### *Contemplation*

Contemplation is about reality - the reality of myself, of the world, and of God. It is about seeing things as they really are, rather than as I have made them or wish them to be. As for Merton, so with me: the root of contemplation is my awareness that my God and the world are inseparable.

My contemplation is my perspective on the world, a perspective that tries to treat each person I meet as unique. It is a perspective too that tries to see the presence of God in my approach to and communication with the people with whom I relate. It is something I worked hard at showing in my chapter about my educative relationship with John (chapter 3). Contemplation for me too, as for Merton (King, 1995: 9), is about my exploring and becoming the unique human being I am meant to be. It is passive in that I am receptive to what happens as I work out of my perceived rhythm of life, which includes silence (as discussed in chapter 5). But this mode is active too. I can't come to an appreciation of my own reality, that of others, and of God, without change and transformation. And change and transformation can't come about without an active commitment on my part. In other words my passive, interior contemplation only begins to bear fruit in my relationships with others. In this sense then, contemplation helps me to create myself so that I can enable others.

One way Merton describes contemplation I find especially attractive. It is a description that resonates with my view of dialectics as a form of question and answer as I construct my living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993) - and spiritual theory, too. Here is how Merton (1961: 4) puts it:

*The life of contemplation implies two levels of awareness: first, awareness of the question, and second, awareness of the answer. Though these are two distinct and enormously different levels, yet they are in fact an awareness of the same thing. The question is, itself, the answer. And we ourselves are both. We awaken, not to find an answer absolutely distinct from the question, but to realise that the question is its own answer. And all is summed up in one awareness - not a proposition, but an experience: 'I Am.'*

But I agree with King (1995: 10) when he says that: "contemplation defies formulation and description. It remains elusive and open, awaiting a specific human life in a particular context to give it context." I cannot clearly conceptually define contemplation. Only by pointing ostensibly to its practice in my life can I show it in its 'living' dimension. In case I get carried away by romantic notions about contemplation enabling me to be wafted along on clouds far above the earth, Merton warns me thus (1961: 12):

*Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish, or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depth of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding.*

But now to my move from Ireland to England, from a religious community to life in a flat without a religious community. Below I talk about my experiences of that change to Bath in the period, 1995 to 1998.

#### *Living in Bath apart from my religious community*

As for Merton in the 60's, so for me, in the 90's, changes came about in my life. First, there was my transition from monastery life in

Ireland to life in a flat in Bath, England without my religious community. This transition for me began when, on 14th March, 1995, I told Jack in a fax that my religious congregation was releasing me to go and live in Bath in order to finish my Ph.D. thesis and that I felt relieved and happy. Sad, too though, that I had lost meaningful work, but glad to be away from a work situation that had become increasingly difficult for me. I had difficulty relating to those in authority in my workplace and had, in fact, experienced increasing difficulty over two years (1993-1995), had stayed with it in spite of tension but was now relieved that it was at an end (chapter 5).

In other ways, too, this change was strange for me. For the first time in my life I was living on my own. I had lived in a religious community since 1957. I wondered now how I would cope with loneliness and with solitude. Would it be life-giving for me? In the event though, when I arrived in Bath on 5th May, 1995 to live on my own, I felt a sense of exhilaration, of freedom. I could now use this opportunity of being on my own, like Merton, to begin to work on my sense of self-worth. I had no blueprint, however, for bringing this to consciousness and to then dealing with it. The Zen saying I quoted already, "*When the pupil is ready, the teacher will come*" (Shannon, 1993: 8) is helpful to me now. I have to wait for change to happen and change won't come about until I am ready for it. That happened I believe when I met with Judi Marshall and Jack Whitehead on 3rd July, 1996 to discuss what I then called my "*unworthiness*," which I will talk about shortly.

The tensions and opposites that I continue to meet within myself, Merton also met. He wasn't concerned, though, with resolving the tensions and paradoxes that resided within him (Padovano, 1984: 62). What apparently mattered more to him was to get them to converge. He wanted to bring apparently impossible combinations together, for example, masculine and feminine, eastern and western religions and spiritualities, objective and subjective. And so for him, his spirituality was built on paradox and contrast, ambivalence and perplexity; contradictions that converged rather than found once-off resolutions. As I have shown in my various chapters, there are 'living



contradictions' in my life and work, too. I show myself being happy to discover and recognise what they are and to work, like Merton, towards a dialectic of convergence, rather than solution. For me, 'solution' doesn't happen. Why not? I see myself often repeating the same contradictions, not out of malice, but simply because I am human. So I am repeatedly faced with attempting, again and again, to try and negate my contradictions.

*My spirituality is about being responsible for my own life*

Merton, in his "Author's Note" to one of his books (1955: xii), tells me that I have to struggle to find meaning, and to have this as a purpose in my life, a task that is difficult because it is different for everybody. He says:

*each individual .... has to work out his own personal salvation for himself in fear and trembling. We can help one another to find out the meaning of life, no doubt. But in the last analysis the individual person is responsible for living his own life and for 'finding himself.'*

Merton's reference to 'fear and trembling' alerts me to the work of Kierkegaard (with whom he was familiar) and his reference to the importance of the effort of the individual in pursuit of an individual spiritual life. According to Kierkegaard, the crucial question for me is: am I or am I not in a God-relationship? (Vardy, 1996: 30), a question addressed to me as an individual! I can't live out my spirituality, my life of relationship, by being a part of a crowd or group. But like Kierkegaard, I strongly believe that genuine community can be found only among people who have first become individuals (Vardy, 1996: 72) in the sense of both discovering and creating their own sense of identity and integrity. While knowing that I must come to my own form of spirituality on my own, Merton (1964: 58-59) also talks about the need for the support and community of others: *"we ought to stand on our own feet - but one cannot learn to do this until he has first recognised to what extent he requires the support of others."*

If I am certain and never ask questions, I can't move forward, improve, be transformed. And so Merton (1964: xiii) feels, as I do, that a certain amount of uncertainty is necessary if I am to come to a meaning in my life, a meaning that leads to me discovering my own form of spirituality. If I feel uncertain, anxious, it is a sign that I have further questions to answer, but to answer them I must first ask them even if asking them brings me fear of no answer:

*anxiety is the mark of spiritual insecurity. It is the fruit of unanswered questions. But questions cannot go unanswered unless they first be asked. And there is a far worse anxiety, a far worse insecurity, which comes from being afraid to ask the right questions - because they might turn out to have no answer. One of the moral diseases we communicate to one another in society comes from huddling together in the pale light of an insufficient answer to a question we are afraid to ask.*

#### *Joy and being individual helps me create community*

I call Thomas Merton my spiritual father because of the joy he exuded. Seitz (1993: 42-43), an American poet-friend of Merton, imaginatively constructs what he concludes the Abbott said in his valedictory at Merton's funeral: *"a younger brother, even a boyish brother, who could have lived a hundred years without growing old .... we laughed at him, and with him, as we would a younger brother, still we respected him as the spiritual father of our souls."* It is this joy, this youthfulness I too want to live and feel that I often indeed do live. On the other hand, because I know I have had, like Merton, at least in the past, a tendency for self-indulgence, being in a religious community suits me in that I am able to dialectically live with the tension between my inclination towards self-indulgence and the self-discipline the religious life enables me to have. I have been overjoyed, however, to discover between 1995 and 1998, that I have a capacity for living a self-disciplined life that doesn't perhaps now need the 'rules' of religious life. I discovered that being in religious life has a more important meaning for me than discipline, even self-discipline. It consists of two related values: my care for others and my free belief in a God of my own understanding who is most to be found for me in my relationships with others. Regarding my care for others, like

Merton (1966: 156-157), I have for many years now been "overwhelmed with the realisation that I love all .... people." I believe, too, my studies of singularity show this at least to some extent.

But Merton (1966: xiv), while wishing to adhere to the Catholic tradition, doesn't wish to accept that tradition blindly. It's another mark of his desire to search for and find an individual spirituality that suits him. He says:

*I do not intend to divorce myself at any point from Catholic tradition. But neither do I intend to accept points of that tradition blindly, and without understanding, and without making them really my own. For it seems to me that the first responsibility of a (person) of faith is to make his faith really part of his own life, not by rationalising it but by living it.*

And it isn't only by conceptually analysing it, and by rationalising it, that I come to a knowledge of my own spirituality. No, I must live it. Among my tentative efforts to understand my need for my own individual independence has been my search for my spirituality. Some of it matured for me as a result of my last encounter before his death with a friend of mine, Larry. I wrote up what I learned in a paper, *Valuing the Spiritual*, which I presented at the CARN Conference, Nottingham Trent University, 10th September, 1995. I will summarise below the main values I saw in Larry's life which I believe are influencing me in my life as I am constantly endeavouring to evolve a spirituality which is discernibly my own, but is also Christian.

## 2. Achieving self-realisation: learning from others, and they from me

Below is a summary of my last conversation with Larry who died in Dublin in September, 1995, some months after I went to live in Bath. I went to visit him on Monday, 28th August, 1995 and the following short extract is part of our conversation:

Larry     Yes, I have cancer. I have been given three months to live but I may die sooner. Funny, it wasn't until a past pupil commented that I had lost a lot of weight that I

*found out.*

**Ben**      *And how are you now?*

**Larry**      *Well, I have accepted it. The way I see it is that I am lucky to have had fifty-one years; many others don't. So I feel I haven't done too badly at all.*

**Ben**      *And when you look back what do you feel about your life?*

**Larry**      *I enjoyed it. And I did what I was asked to do in school and I'm happy to think I did it well. What more could you ask?*

**Ben**      *And what is it like for you at the moment?*

**Larry**      *Well, I eat a little at 8.00 a.m. and get up at 10.00 a.m. It's good to be able to look after myself still. I take a rest at 1.30 p.m. in the afternoon. You see, I have to be at my best when many people call to see from about 4.00 p.m. onwards.*

Larry's death some two weeks later caused me also to think about death and its meaning for me. I wondered about Larry's last nights as he prepared for death. Were they like those Merton spoke about in his journal (Burton [Ed] 1988: 109) when he said (December 5, 1964):

*the quality of one's nights depends on the sanity of the day. I bring there the sins of the day into the light and darkness of truth .... then I want to fly back to disguises .... One can pretend in the solitude of an afternoon walk, but the night alone destroys all pretences. One is reduced to nothing and is compelled to begin laboriously the long return to truth.*

I have no way of knowing this, of course, but I believe Larry's living out of each day was such that the night did not at the end hold any terrors for him. His nights were perhaps a personal recognition of the peace that had perhaps 'come dropping slow' throughout his life, but that he now possessed in great measure as death faced him. I believe Larry would also recognise without fear Merton's (In Burton [Ed] 1988: 108) further thoughts about death on December 4, 1964, when he said:

*How often in the last years I have thought of death. It has been present to me and I have 'understood' and known that I must die.*

*Yet last night, only for a moment, in passing and so to speak without grimness or drama, I momentarily experienced the fact that I, this body, this self, will simply not exist. A flash of the 'not-thereness' of being dead. Without fear or grief, without anything. Just not there. And this, I suppose, is one of the first tastes of the fruits of solitude. As if the Angel of Death passed along, thinking aloud to himself, doing his business and barely taking notice of me, but taking note of me nevertheless. So we recognised one another.*

Larry's life drawing to its close and Merton's thoughts on death reminded me of the inevitability of my own death, but not a death announcing that all is over. I believe in an afterlife but it is a life that I neither know nor can know until after my death. I cannot, therefore, linger on its possible meaning. No, the 'inevitability' of my own death means that I have an opportunity to live existentially a good and productive life (Fromm, 1991: 18). I live then with issues of life and death and, in fact, it is often in the event of the death of somebody close to me that issues to do with *"intimacy, generativity, and integrity .... are confronted"* (E. A. Whitehead & J.D. Whitehead, 1982: 34). I believe then that Larry's death accentuated that movement for me. So, often in my form of contemplative spirituality, I contemplate death without fear or morbidity but with a certainty that it will come. A desire wells up within me to use well existentially the time left to me to work for others and, in the process, to increase my sense of my own self-worth, a self-worth that includes a strong sense of my identity and integrity. Larry's death reminded me for the first time that my thinking had to let go of *"time-since-birth"* and that I now needed to move to *"time-left-to-live"* (ibid, p. 129).

Larry, it seemed to me, was satisfied with how he had led his life; that he had accomplished what he had set out to do. His main worry at the end was that he would be in a fit state to receive his friends. His mind was on others rather than on himself. I was so struck by what he had accomplished: profound simplicity; enormous freedom, freedom from sadness and from terror; there was peace - from whence did it come? And courage! Thinking back to when we first met I realised that he seemed to be mostly at peace. No ambition other than to teach, and to do it well. No ambition to climb promotional ladders. He didn't allow his life to be guided by *"technical rationality"*

nor competition, nor over-consumption, nor ambition. Rather, he had an over-riding purpose in his life to do with his transformation. As I understand it, throughout his life, Larry grew in self-knowledge and self-understanding, values that Au and Cannon (1995: 3) refer to as "*spiritual transformation*."

It seems to me that I observed in Larry, Merton's strong view that our form of spirituality has to be individual, has to be ours alone and lived alone interiorly. Because Merton is preoccupied, as I am, with the need for a strong sense of my own identity, I find what he said (1964: 22) about being solitary involving aloneness and identity particularly helpful:

*it is the solitary person .... who does mankind the inestimable favour of reminding it of its true capacity for maturity, liberty and peace.*

As Merton said in 1953 (in Furlong, 1995: 167):

*Solitude is not found so much by looking outside the boundaries of your dwelling, as by staying within. Solitude is not something you must hope for in the future. Rather, it is a deepening of the present, and unless you look for it in the present you will never find it.*

I believe that Larry's life as with Merton's, showed me how the interior life, the life of solitude, could be lived, but also, the exterior practical spiritual life; how each could enliven, quicken the other. Merton warns me, however, of the danger of becoming consumed by activism, even if done as fulfilment of my vow of obedience. In his journal (1st May, 1947 [1953], in Furlong, 1995: 167), he says:

*Is it an act of virtue for a contemplative to sit down and let himself be snowed under by activities? .... Does the fact that all of this is obedience make it really pleasing to God? I wonder. I do not ask these questions in a spirit of rebellion. I would really like to know the answers.*

*Merton and his writing 'problems'*

The question of writing posed problems for Merton. Padovano (1984: 33) puts it this way:

*Writing was the most central of his (Merton's) many vocations. He need not have become a Catholic or a Trappist. But writing was a need over which he had no control. It complicated his life immeasurably, but he had no alternative.*

During this period in the 50's Merton couldn't entirely make up his mind whether his writing or his desire to live a more intense monastic life was more important. Writing might take away his concentration on what he felt was his primary goal, his religious vocation (1953: 17). Despite the help of his friends outside the monastery, the monks in the monastery, and the success of his work with the novices (he was appointed Novice Master in 1955), Merton became depressed. Partly then, in the need to understand more about the psychology of his novices, but also in attempt to resolve his own depression, he began to take an interest in psychology. This interest was to have unforeseen consequences!

At a private meeting with Gregory Zilboorg, a psychoanalyst and convert from Judaism to Catholicism at which Dom James Fox (Merton's Abbott) was present, Zilboorg confronted Merton (Furlong, 1995: 213), suggesting that Merton's desire to be a hermit was pathological and that what he really wanted was a hermitage on Times Square, New York, with a big sign saying "*Hermit lives here.*" He described Merton's writing as being incoherent, being little more than babble; his vocation was to exhibitionism that included his yearning to become a hermit and his commitment to writing. Merton never knew that the meeting was set up to dissuade him from writing. In any case he was stunned. However, the most important result from his point of view was that he had resolved that his writing was at least as critical to his identity as any other commitment in his life. And Dr. James Wygal, a psychologist friend to Merton, confirmed to Abbott Fox that Merton struck him as being the least neurotic personality he had met; that he had a tremendous capacity for relating to others.

Merton accepted the way he had been treated by Zilboorg, but he began changing in how he viewed religious life and the church from the 50's onwards. As Furlong (1995: 225) points out: *"He was no longer dutiful, no longer worried about being a 'good monk' or even a 'good Catholic,' and no longer 'pious' in the old priggish sense."* He began to criticise authority - his old blind trust in it was gone forever. He saw that enormous changes were afoot in the Church and that everything previously accepted would be called into question. And he began to believe in disturbance. Speaking to a monk who was going to South America he said, citing two of his friends: *"See, if Dan Berrigan (a well-known opponent of the Vietnam War) or Dan Walsh (a local academic) comes down here and says something that disturbs you, see that's good."* Much of his concern was now focused on the problems of the world in an attempt to clarify them for himself. And if that meant causing disturbance in others' minds about these issues, so be it.

I don't need to be immortalised on Times Square, New York. I don't need any caption to be erected there extolling me or my virtues. However, like Merton, I am concerned that my integrity and my sense of my identity be considered sacred. I am often quite apprehensive when I notice my existence being taken for granted. Because I am a member of a religious congregation that is governed by rules and regulations, I am constantly concerned that these rules and regulations not over-rule my need for my separateness to be recognised, and my individuality to be cherished. These concerns about recognition of integrity, identity, separateness and individuality are some of those I have been researching in my relationships with others in my earlier chapters.

*I meet a crisis: I am unable to write*

Like Merton, writing has become increasingly important to me. It helps me to clarify who I am becoming. Through enquiry, writing is helping me to improve what I am doing in questions of the kind, *"How do I improve what I am doing?"* However, between Christmas



and June, 1996, I got completely blocked as regards my writing. I could write nothing. I became paralysed with indecision. I seemed to be unable to go forward or back. In the midst of this crisis of indecision and some desperation I asked Jack if I might seek the help of Professor Judi Marshall, School of Management, University of Bath. Jack agreed with alacrity. I paid one visit to Judi on 11th June, 1996 and a second with Jack on 3rd July, 1996. It is with this latter visit I wish to deal.

Both Judi and Jack were naturally concerned that I find 'form', the form I would use to write the thesis. So did I, but I also knew that there were a number of things that needed to surface, before I would be ready to write again. Judi suggested that I write on a chart whatever came into my head. The first word I wrote in block letters was UNWORTHINESS followed by AUTHORITY. Of authority I said:

*Actually, sometimes when I hear the word I get locked. It dilutes my energy completely .... when a person tells me they're in charge of something, internally I freeze and it takes me quite a while to find the person within the authority. And for me the antithesis of it is liberation.*

I don't think I needed Merton's psychoanalyst, Zilboorg nor even Dr. Wygal, to indicate that I hadn't then worked through the experiences I had at the college (1993-1995) nor in my religious life situation (1990-1995) at that point.

In my previous chapter, chapter 5, I have discussed my use of authority of position when considering "*doing my leadership differently.*" Perhaps the interior tumult I was experiencing during my writing block, which I was eventually to explain to Judi Marshall, wasn't unlike that of Merton's, though he was grappling with something different: which had priority, his religious vocation or his writing?, not then knowing that both could co-exist for him! For me, I needed to accept myself as I was. I needed to accept that my leadership of my religious community and my leadership of an action research project was lived out of my desire to bring together the contemplative, passive side of me with the active side. Both interior and exterior ways of being were constantly contending in my life.

Regarding 'authority' though, I am only now applying it to myself as leader of my religious community (I was leader from 1990 to 1995). How was I as leader of the religious community? Was I, for example, 'controlling'? I needed also to take on board the next phrase I used with Judi and Jack: *"I started letting go of these words, dogma and ritual, they seemed to me to be controlling mechanisms as well."*

In my journal (29th October, 1993) I had written:

*As regards superiority (religious leadership of the community of 13 brothers) I feel it now has no clearly defined role. I do not know how I am supposed to lead this community. The rule book is no help. Our community, it seems to me, is unsure of the role of the brother in today's world .... Yet I .... sense that whatever we offer collectively at the college comes out of whatever we are as brothers. How to find that something is the problem!*

I wanted to persuade the community of which I was religious leader to move from a *"spirituality of devotion"* to a *"spirituality of contemplation."* It seemed to me that a 'spirituality of devotion' was more in tune with a world of certainty which we no longer had. Merton (Furlong, 1995: 234) believed, as I do, that we have to move away from *"the disease of absolutes."* It seems to me, as it does to him, that a life 'full of uncertainties' with only 'a few plausible possibilities' needs the question and answer type approach of a 'spirituality of contemplation.' I felt we as religious community needed to experience the absence of absolutes, of certainty. It was for this reason that I needed to say to my fellow monks:

*Look, could we suspend our formal prayer, our saying of the Divine Office (consisting mainly of psalms), at least temporarily? Why? Because I sincerely believe that we need to explore and research what we are about. Maybe we need to see what our prayer life is contributing to who we are and perhaps we could best do it by its absence!*

I wrote in my journal (4th November, 1993) what 'saying prayers' as a member of community felt like to me:

*Why have the public prayers we say as religious so lost their savour for me? .... Do they (the brothers) really believe in what they are doing and saying? I'd really love to know because I can*

*make very little sense of what's going on! I often feel like a marionette which has been wound up and let go. I mouth words which do not seem to belong to me. I pause. Others pause. Are we all marionettes? .... Sometimes, I'd love to bark but then marionettes don't do that! What a shock it would cause if I could do it. The thought fascinates me .... We are all so solemn. If I were God I'd laugh at us!*

I wasn't surprised to find Merton also had problems with prayer when in church surrounded by the monks. It made him feel "stifled, crushed, claustrophobically trapped in a situation that he was powerless to change" (Furlong, 1995: 176). Prayer in the woods, in fact anywhere where he was alone was a deep and tranquil experience for him, "one that had grown in him to an often wordless stillness." The tranquillity of aloneness and stillness is also now one of my chosen fora for prayer. The other is when I'm with people.

But to return to my desire for prayer experimentation with my previous religious community, I wasn't at all surprised when one of our province leaders eventually asked me to allow the community to return to formal prayers. "The brothers want it," he told me. "They want life to run smoothly." In hindsight, I believe I had the right to experiment for myself, but not to so prescribe for others.

In the conversation with Judi I also mentioned my ambivalence about my personal God. I put it as follows: "I felt I had to consciously lay aside whatever notions I had of God when I arrived in Bath." Judi was surprised and intrigued. She said:

*Leaving God aside, feeling the need to leave God aside - that sounds like an incredible moment in one's life .... if I were doing it, it would be turning my frame around and living in another way. I'd be very interested in the process that made you do that. Explore it gently and what the consequences are of that.*

In subsequently exploring it 'gently', I decided that the question for me no longer was, "Do I believe in God?" but rather, "Do I live out God?" (Solle, 1990: 186). I concluded that I do it in my I-Thou (Buber, 1975) relationships. God is a meaning to be lived by me and not a distant truth formula to which I pay lip-service. That is the form of Christianity I wish to live out. For me this form of Christianity is

more important than doctrine, or dogma, or sacramentality, or liturgy. In saying this I am aware that I am in fact changing from religion to faith. In doing so I am leaving behind what Varrone (in Gallagher, 1995: 64) calls: *"False God pleased-by-duty and by fear, the facile and useful God of efficacious rites."*

Prayer in my Christian life now means my communication, verbal or non-verbal, in my relationship with God and others. Some of it consists in my contemplation, meditation on my own when I am bearing others in mind even though they are not physically present to me. It is in there that I consolidate my notion of God as relationship and the idea that he needs me - a reversal of what I had been taught as a Christian. But in order to come to these views I had to 'forget' God for an appreciable amount of time after I arrived in Bath. Moira Laidlaw 'worried' about my stance (13th August, 1996):

*I don't think you should shunt God aside because of your sensitivity towards others. After all, your love of God is one of the things that distinguishes you. It was one of the things I remember you talking about in an audio taped conversation with Jack, yourself and me in 1993. Your belief in your God made a great impression on me.*

She was right, of course. Indeed, I wasn't 'shunting' God aside. I was just allowing myself time in order to extract the God I cared for from being possessed and dominated by the church to which I belonged. I researched that very theme in chapters 2 and 3.

Jack commented that I hadn't used the words 'spiritual' or 'spirituality' regarding my relationships and said: *"when I'm in contexts with (Ben) .... I see others come alive because of his presence."* My attribution of unworthiness to myself means that I have to engage in the spiritual quest for worth. I don't possess it automatically. I have to work to achieve it. In my search for worth I had to deal with my feeling of 'failure'. I had tried out new ideas and experimented with an alternative way of being a leader and had felt rebuffed. To overcome it I needed perhaps to *"visit every room in myself"* as I said to Judi, and to share what I was discovering. Judi advised me: *"not to use the word 'spiritual' until you're good and ready"*

*and until it is right."*

Like Merton (in Padovano, 1984: 170-171), I needed to learn to become *"passionate about preserving (my) own individuality,"* that *"nothing is ultimately more sacred than the integrity of (my) own spirit."* I should become *"a pawn in no system."* Like Merton, neither the world, nor the religious life, nor the Church should own or possess me. The process *"of living, of growing up, and becoming a person of worth, is,"* for Merton as for me, *"precisely the gradually increasing awareness of what (the meaning to life) is"* (Furlong, 1995: 200-201).

### *Merton as teacher*

I want to consider Merton as teacher. According to Furlong (1995: 224):

*Merton's gifts as a teacher of novices and scholastics were as great as his gifts as a writer. He enjoyed teaching and found that he enjoyed talking to his students and novices one by one about their spiritual and other problems.*

For him (1953: 336-337), it was much more interesting than writing a book, besides being less fatiguing. Though he now had all the students to care for, he said that it was sometimes like the blind leading the blind. He added that:

*The more I get to know my (students) the more reverence I have for their individuality and the more I meet them in my own solitude .... Their calmness will finally silence all that remains of my own turbulence.*

Though Merton gently uncovered difficulties and problems, he didn't say very much in these sessions. This didn't always go down well. Many of the students expected to be questioned as they had been just a few years before that in high school. Nevertheless they found that Merton acted as a catalyst in their lives and in these sessions with him *"they often found out surprising things about themselves"* (Furlong, 1995: 179).

Merton's' (Furlong, 1995: 180) greatest emphasis, however, was on authenticity and honesty. As one student put it:

*He was very hard on any form of dishonesty, whether conscious or unconscious, and it was mostly unconscious, because we were trying to be as good as we could be. He wouldn't let you do things because they might be expected of you, or because they were the pious thing to do.*

As a teacher educator I am not concerned with the honesty, or lack of it, of others, but of being honest with myself. I try, however, to enable those I meet in educative relationships to move from their taken-for-granted ways of acting to more creative ways of acting, so that their freedom may be liberated. Perhaps that, too, is a form of honesty. It is part of persuading others to face something within themselves or their practices that needs changing. This movement towards creativity and freedom has been part of my intention in my action enquiries with Marlon, Valerie and Rose in chapter 2, with John in chapter 3 and with David in chapter 4. In chapter 5 I had to deal with my perception that my own freedom to think and act was being eroded. I feel my creativity asserted itself in the conflict which I faced, and I ended up retaining my honesty, integrity and my freedom to be.

### *Teaching spirituality, experiencing 'failure'*

I went to 'Bexham' school near Bath on 3rd November, 1995. Like Merton, in my approach to the deputy head, 'Mark', I wanted to live out my spirituality by showing the quality of my 'reverence' towards his 'individuality.' In his office, Mark read out the following from his recent Ofsted report: *"Now, number 2 is what I'm concerned about: 'to improve the provision for pupils' spiritual development.'"*

Mark wanted a policy on what constituted spiritual development. However, because as a teacher like Merton I wished to be authentic and honest (Furlong, 1995: 180), I decided to try and speak from the heart with Mark's staff on 1st November, 1995. I wanted to show the staff the necessity for authenticity and honesty by living and acting

it out with them. I felt that that was the best way, like Merton, to be myself rather than perhaps doing a conceptual, intellectual exercise consisting of classifications that the teachers may have expected. I decided to tell two stories - one of them about Larry's death - and putting myself and my sense of who I am into them.

In the course of my short exposition, Mark interrupted me many times seeking 'clarifications'. He then ignored me and spoke for the next thirty minutes to his staff, starting with: *"I think that what we have to do now is to get definitions of what spiritual development is ...."* I persisted, however, in putting my point of view: *"Don't forget to consider your own and your pupils' experiences of spirituality .... We need evidence, don't we?"* And this despite Mark's retort: *"Personally, I don't see any need for it (evidence)."*

Two days later in my journal (3rd November, 1995) I wrote:

*During the day I don't think much about the fiasco that was last Wednesday .... At night, however, it occasionally returns to mock me - and my sense of myself.*

*Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?*

When speaking to Jack Whitehead and Moira Laidlaw (fellow Bath action researcher) afterwards about my 'failure' at Bexham School, I wondered was *"there something to do with my presentational skills that I might think about."* Out of that consideration arose a question that Jack suggested in order to move my research forward: *"Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?"* I was to investigate this question with a group of action researchers on 27th November, 1995 at Bath University while being videotaped. And like Merton's desire to be authentic, to communicate himself, Jack said to me: *"I just feel the need to test out whether it's possible for you to communicate as you .... it's you and your life that you are actually giving to us. It's your sense of being that you are actually sharing with us."*

Out of meetings I had with Jack Whitehead (16th and 22nd November) emerged four themes I would present to my audience on 27th November. They were:

- (a) *How are we creating community at the University of Bath?*
- (b) *Is there a place for God in my life?*
- (c) *Can I explain my national or is it, my cultural identity?*
- (d) *A Spiritual Vision - what else is there beside market forces, inflation, balance of payment deficits, materialism and so on?*

Below I will offer only the briefest of synopses of each theme.

- (a) *How are we creating community at the University of Bath?*

Referring to our community group of action researchers I said that:

*I found that people listen and not only listen but I'm very conscious that they hear what I'm trying to say. And I think that's true of all of us. We try very hard I think to do that .... (As for myself) I try to be authentic and sincere. And I think there's a quality of empathy there too, that people have told me that I do help them .... I not only engage with people face-to-face but I'm delighted to be engaging with people also through correspondence.*

I went on to link my notions of affirmation of others with what I offered in my mentoring to 'John' (chapter 3) and what I learned from Larry and his death and I finished this section of my input with my articulation of:

*a desire within myself to be at peace, not principally for my own sake, even though it would be good for myself as well, but to be at peace for the sake of others .... And I think it's connected with wisdom as well .... I have to meet a lot more people and I have to offer an awful lot more to a lot of people and for them to offer it to me and then I think maybe I will arrive at that little bit of wisdom.*

- (b) *Is there a place for God in my life?*



Though I hadn't clearly thought out my articulation about what I now believe about God (chapter 2), I was trying to open up and shake off some of my previous views which I felt were too linked to 'church', but most of all, how could my belief in God be linked to my educative and other relationships with people? Some of what I said then on 27th November I expressed as follows:

*I felt a need to look within to see could I get some notion of who this God is that I believe in .... and (in) solitude .... I am beginning to like myself and I'm beginning to love myself .... there's a God whose presence is around that somehow or other I feel is affirming me. And then when I go out and meet other people or I meet the Bath AR community, I can both affirm and be affirmed. There's a kind of a double affirmation going on.*

I believe it was my desire to be responsive to those who do not accept Christianity that caused me to insert the phrase 'my God' in the sub-heading to chapter 2 as follows: "What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with 'John'?" Because I believe in God doesn't mean I expect anybody else to do so. It doesn't mean either that by using 'my' as a prefix in front of the word 'God' that I am intending to 'own' God just for myself.

(c) *Can I explain my national or is it, my cultural identity?*

Remembrance Sunday in Bath in November, 1995 reminded me of the strands of Irish nationalism but also of fighting against Hitler in my own family; of how our two cultures, Irish and British are intertwined creatively too. Of Remembrance Sunday, I said:

*And I saw these veterans with their medals. And the word heroism stood out in my mind very powerfully. There was the music of the band and the drums. And I watched and I looked particularly at the young people, I watched their eyes. And I felt there was a great openness and an effort to try and understand what this was about .... Later in the evening I watched the ritual at the Cenotaph in London on the television. And I was a bit overwhelmed really by the solemnity and the beauty of the ritual. And this is just a little bit that I wrote at the time: 'Solemn. Beautiful. Created by genius knowledge of human nature.'*

*Remembrance ritual signifying life bestowed by the dead.'*

(d) *A Spiritual Vision - What else is there beside market forces, inflation, balance of payment deficits, materialism and so on?*

I said I had a problem with using the phrase 'market economy' or even 'social market economy' and with the use of the phrase 'individual competition' because, as I said:

*I've come across people but who definitely are weak, wounded and frail. And I'm not sure to what extent they'll ever be able to be closely involved in some kind of competition .... And so I do feel .... a bit disappointed that politicians will only speak about things like economics and market forces ....*

I then tried to localise my spiritual vision as one to do with neighbourliness, with relationship:

*And when I was up in Jack's house recently, on Jack's window beside the door there was this little sticker which said, 'neighbourhood watch'. And I said, yeah. That's part of it. It doesn't mean just surveillance in that my next-door neighbour is going to keep my goods and property safe for me. There's a direct connection, I think, between wanting to be available to my neighbour, to look after my neighbour and not just my neighbour's goods.*

#### Discussion at the meeting

In the discussion, then, that followed my presentation, the participants responded variously from it feeling like, as Paul said, "a celebration" to Colin, who felt my "message came over very powerfully," although I hadn't managed to bring the parts of it together yet. Moira felt moved by the "authority of your own experience" and my "enthusiasm" and she felt that "there were the intimations of a synthesis." For Steve, what was of the essence was my care for others that:

*what really comes out .... when you start talking about other people, like your remembrances, your experiences, it's all there,*

*it's living. It's just amazing, sort of the care and the empathy, call it what you will, that you actually show to other people. I mean I've experienced that when talking to you. When you start talking about other people and what they've meant to you, I mean your care really comes out. When you talk about disembodied things like economics and stuff like that, it isn't really you.*

Steve continued:

*I know he does live his values. The first time I met him he sat there and gave up of his very valuable time and .... listened and talked. Right. And that's incredibly rare. People don't do that. And he does it all the time to people who he's never met. He lives out those values .... it's there. And we're all witness to that.*

Paul was very right to sound a note of warning, even if humorous: "If we're not careful this is going to degenerate into a Ben Appreciation Society ...." (laughter). At Jack's request I repeated my opening question: "Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?" Jack felt that: "it's that second part to do with 'knowing' .... that needed working with." He wondered too about:

*poetic forms of communication, I'm asking whether or not there have been moments or episodes, just times this evening when there was something about the way he (Ben) was communicating which really captivated your imagination in that poetic sense .... there were moments when Ben's face lit up, there was an increased passion in his voice and I was very conscious at those moments of having my imagination gripped.*

Paul felt these moments occurred when "he (Ben) was talking with his heart rather than thinking with his head." But Paul also wanted to know what "the purpose of the presentation" was? Beth echoed it when she asked: "Why do you want to communicate your values which is what you're saying, isn't it?"

My answer was this:

*I suppose a part of me wanted to communicate who I am .... and I now believe I succeeded to some extent this evening .... I wanted to explain myself to myself, actually.*

Jack took up my phrase, saying,

*the last phrase that Ben used, 'I'm explaining myself to myself.' Now why I do think this was important to Ben is that it is, as he said, the first time that he's actually, I think, KNOWN what he's been doing, in other words KNOWING. And he has lived this tonight. And he's also shown I think and the video I believe will confirm this, that he can also have some confidence in his knowing. So when he explains himself to himself in terms of a fundamental part of his research he will make public, in a way which is communicable, these spiritual qualities which are in fact very important to human existence.*

*I move from alienation from my religious congregation to reaffiliation*

Now I come to another moment in my life in Bath where I knew that to augment my sense of worth I needed to attempt to resolve my feeling of alienation from my religious congregation. It arose mainly because of the bureaucratisation and hierarchy I experienced at the college run by my congregation. Was my sense of alienation similar to that of Merton? He had (1973, in Padovano, 1984: 170-171) defined alienation as the end result of a life lived according to conditions someone else determines. He observed that "*alienation is an experience of the self kept as prisoner by another. A prisoner is locked into a system that allows no participation.*" I did, indeed, often "*experience (my)self kept as prisoner by another,*" and by the system, too. And it was a system that allowed little 'participation,' as I experienced it in chapter 5. But now I needed to move towards reaffiliation with my congregation because I was excited that my search for personal identity coincided with my religious congregation's search for a new corporate identity. This it expressed in a short booklet called *New Beginnings* (1996), which was the outcome of discussion and argument at its six-yearly general meeting in Africa.

The congregation booklet, *New Beginnings* (1996), had a section called 'Strategies' and 'Action' which read:

*Each Province and Region Leadership Team will establish means of assisting brothers to attend more fully to the requirements of*

*personal growth especially in the affective aspects of their lives (and that) Province and Region leaders will use the occasion of Leadership Meetings to exchange experiences and resources on matters relating to holistic human development and male spirituality.*

The booklet (p. 14) also said that:

*The Core Renewal Team in the organisation of the congregational programmes, will ensure that the affective elements of the participants' experiences are integrated in the overall renewal processes.*

On reading it, Jack felt that:

*you've already attended 'to the requirements of personal growth especially in the affective aspects of (your life).' I think your thests and the way in which you'll be able to construct that thesis will show that. And more than that, your thesis, as a form of expression and meaning and communication, will be about the exchange of: 'experiences and resources on matters relating to holistic human development ....'*

I noted that the third of 'Four Directions' in the booklet talks of 'Growth Through Fragility.' I agree with the description the booklet (p. 12) gives of this fragility when it says that:

*There are signs of that death in our congregational story. Such signs include severity of discipline, harshness in community life, child abuse, an addiction to success, canonising work to the neglect of our basic human needs for intimacy, leisure and love. Today we have been made painfully aware of these aspects of our sinful history.*

It seems to me that being weak and fragile predisposes me to understanding how to be intimate in relationship with others. I can't easily rationalise that connection. I feel I know it only because of my experience. At our action research group at Bath University on 12th May, 1997 I explained how I understood intimacy. Practising it would, I believed, help myself and others to improve both personally and professionally. Bochen (1998: 29) characterises intimacy as "that sense of being known and knowing another and sensing that one is accepted as one is in a relationship."

Prior to the meeting (12th May, 1997), I had spent some weeks preparing a series of 'imaginary dialogues' which helped me to express the connection between the sacred and the intimate in my life. I decided to test out these hypotheses at my action research group meeting at the University of Bath on 12th May, 1997. Firstly, I prepared for this meeting a then summary draft of my thesis from chapters 1 to 7. Secondly, I composed a creative question to the group as follows: *"How do I accept and reveal myself to you so that you can accept and open yourself to others?"* Thirdly, I chose an imaginary dialogue I had composed to offer to the group. Below is a summary of that dialogue:

*My living with loneliness and sadness is actually positive*

I give an example of when I last felt deep loneliness and sadness and how my belief in my God helped me. Both loneliness and sadness teach me too that I am needy and being needy teaches me why I behave the way I do. And so being fragile helps me to be and remain humble which is necessary to my well-being.

*You        Tell me .... about loneliness and sadness.!*

*I            .... The last time I entered deeply into that experience of loneliness was when I got a phone call from 'Joe' at HQ in Dublin in January, 1996. He was worried about me and suggested I come back to Ireland to 'explain' myself, as it were.... Deep within myself I experienced a feeling of utter desolation. It was even physical - a well of pain in my stomach. I wished I could cry out but I couldn't. There I was, full of pain, some of it so physical that I couldn't soften sufficiently to cry! .... Strangely enough, I felt that if I voiced my desolation to any of them I would have got protestations of: 'Whatever do you mean?' Or, 'Do you think we would have suggested you go to Bath if we had been worried about how you would cope?'*

*I also realised that most of what I do, any work I do, I do to gain approval. Yes, I need the approval of those who are important to me .... My mind told me that I wanted to be the person my HQ approved of, respected,*

*perhaps even appreciated .... Gradually, though, I came to know also that the God I have often said I believed in actually accepted me in my neediness. He had all along been waiting for me. He had been and is a presence here in my flat.*

**You**      *What about sadness? What's its basis?*

**I**            *.... For me, it is a stage on the way to being lonely. And the deeper I get into loneliness the deeper I get into sadness .... It helps, too, to put my actions and behaviours into a context where I can recognise that they are not the most important things in my life. When this illumination comes my outer and my inner self become reconciled.*

### **Discussion**

In the summary I offered the group of my writing of my thesis, Robyn wondered why, I had, as she put it, *"looked outside yourself for definitions of spirituality .... ?."* I said:

*I hadn't looked into myself initially because of my low self-worth .... but that is shifting now. My opinion of myself is considerably .... strengthened. I now know I have something to offer, but it took me a long time to get to that point. So that's why I couldn't really look inside. And I think a person is right not to look inside until they feel they're strong enough to do it.*

Robyn then wanted to know if I had *"a definition of spirituality?"* Jack, referring to the Hockerill Lecture on Spirituality in the Curriculum by Jack Priestley (1997), read:

*How then are we to proceed? To start with it is, I suggest, by refusing to define what we mean by the spiritual, not as a way of escape, but as a matter of principle. Cupitt's warning is very real. To fall to the temptation to define is itself to throw in the towel, to acknowledge the superiority of a rationality, which is based on a denial of the spiritual .... To arrest the spiritual in order to define it is to murder it on the spot. The spirit can no more be defined than a human being can and for much the same reason. But it can be described and that description can be a disciplined description.*

By *"disciplined description"* Jack said he meant what Pam Lomax calls *"a double dialectic."* Basically, it means that I am involved in the

discipline of revealing my inner voice, what Pam Lomax calls the intradialectic, the 'intra' meaning 'within'. It includes also the interdialectic, the 'inter' meaning 'with others.' Below is Lomax's (1999: 14) latest and clearest explanation of the double or interdialectic which, she says is:

*the outcome of a dialectical process that leads to change. I think there are two aspects to this - (a) the way we learn through representing our meanings to ourselves (an intra-subjective dialectic) and (b) the way we learn by representing our meanings to others (an inter-subjective dialectic).*

According to Jack, I am offering in my thesis a disciplined description that integrates both the 'intra' and the 'inter'- dialectic, which involves question and answer, contradictions and tensions, which helps to move me forward through my imagined possibilities, my actions and evaluation of them, and through the action research enquiry cycles, too. All of these are the qualities in my thesis that Jack calls 'disciplined'.

After the group had read my two imaginary dialogues, one of which I summarised above, Jack asked the group:

*Could I ask - this is important regarding the validity of an account - how the language is being used? You could also say something about your authentic response, you know, how are you feeling, if it is meditative, anything, so that Ben gets an appropriate feeling himself about how this writing is being received. What does it do to you as you read it?*

When Moira had read all of my 12 dialogues (in my data archive) the previous week, she replied to me, saying:

*I had a very strong sense of you talking to yourself. And I hadn't understood before how powerful that could be .... it is real dialogue .... I find it very touching, very moving.*

At the meeting itself, Pat felt "that you're conducting with yourself .... a dialogue between your two selves .... which are then part of your self."

For Jane, her feelings about my intimacy dialogue



*(are) absolutely overwhelming. I find this quite, quite beautiful .... why this is so wonderful (is) because .... you have questioned yourself here .... how often do we have discussions like this with other human beings in our lives, I think it's quite rare, isn't it?*

Pam C felt that it "speaks exactly the same way to me as to you. And everybody is taking out of it a little part of themselves."

Jack thought that it was

*important to look at my question where I said, 'How do I accept and reveal myself to you - and that is what people are saying Ben does. And now the second part is 'so that you (the audience present) can accept and open yourself to others?' Now, we've got the first part it seems in our responses, so we recognise that that is what Ben is doing. And I would imagine, in our terms, that has been successful. But what about the second part? - so that you can accept and open yourself to others?*

Robyn explained the second part thus:

*it began to explain to me a little bit about why I had the nerve to have some of the conversations with you (Ben) that I've had .... talking to you about what my prejudices about religion were. Why did I choose you to be telling these things to - because you somehow allowed me to do this. What I received back was that it was OK and so I could go on doing it. I just found myself open to you (laughs).*

Robyn had applied the second part, accepting and opening herself to others, to me! She was able to open herself to me.

Chris, referring to me and the second part of my question, thought

*that there are a whole series of experiences you've gone through that you are trying to put into some sort of context in your mind so that you can actually offer some advice and listening to people in the future .... the thing you are touching on here, loneliness and sadness in its various forms, if you talk to anybody around the table, they've all got their own sort of sadnesses .... And the question is whether somebody is able to talk to you about it in a sort of listening, non-threatening way?*

Jack said that if the group looked

*at the second part of Ben's question (being) able to talk about and explain how that has been helpful in dealing with (Chris's) sense of grief (and loneliness and sadness) in another does seem to me to be exactly what Ben is questioning here in accepting (the idea of) opening yourself to others.*

Pat takes up Jack's reference to 'questioning' and says that:

*It's not exactly a new revelation to say that being a good listener is a very good important quality.*

Jack responds to Pat thus:

*Now, if you ask what does it mean to be a 'good', a 'good' listener?, there's a complete shift of emphasis and meaning .... That seems to me to be very related to why Robyn would feel that immediate rapport in the sense of Ben being not just a good listener in those terms of listening well, but a good person who is listening well.*

*How do I accept and reveal myself to you so that you can accept and open yourself to others?*

I am repeating my question here so that I can consider Moira Laidlaw's individual answer to it in a letter she sent to me (5th May, 1997). I also want to consider the views of people other than our action research group whom I also consulted. But first, Moira's answer. Having read all of my imaginary dialogues the previous week, Moira in writing to me, refers to my view that perhaps religious brothers "*may be seen these days by the wider society as irrelevant but that you are not irrelevant.*" She also felt that:

*You're doing something .... that is quite unique, I think. You are binding the secular and the sacred in a seamless mantle. Binding them through your personal relationship to God. Your (writing) lays great stress on your right to your own silences and times for contemplation.*

She went on to say that:

*It is fascinating to me that you write about intimacy with others*

*and show how you are achieving that and what it means in relation to your three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience .... and yet somehow the greatest achievement I have seen is your own acceptance of yourself and the intimacy - tolerance, lack of moralistic judgment - about yourself.*

She summarised the themes of my intimacy imaginary dialogues thus:

*(What) I find so impressive is the kind of questions (you) appear to be supporting .... without safety-nets:*

- \* 'How do I deal with loneliness and sadness?'*
- \* 'How can I have intimate relationships within my vows of chastity, poverty and obedience?'*
- \* 'How can I help to form and maintain intimate relationships with myself and others?'*
- \* 'How do I nurture my relationships with God?' and from the latter two:*
- \* 'How can I spiritually grow in such a way that the former two questions are not contradictory?'*

Moira also says that "At the heart of human existence, it seems to me that there is mystery" and "what I love about (your writing) is that this sense of wonder and awe which you clearly experience as part of your life's development is harnessed to give you strength and courage to face the truth for you." She finished by saying:

*I think this (writing) is a testament to your developing spirituality (of which courage and humility, being and becoming, reflection and action [to name but a few] are 'presenting symptoms' if you like). Your (writing) inspires me.*

Zoe Parker (lecturer at Kingston University), writing to me on 20th May, 1997 about my intimacy imaginary dialogues, among other things said:

*I address this letter to you as 'dearer' because I feel that you become more dear to me as I learn more about who you are .... The notion of intimacy appeals to me on a very profound level of my being .... I think that your ideas are offering me a way of looking at the distance between human beings as perhaps the necessary space for contemplation and reflection.*

Frank, one of my religious congregation leaders, speaking to me (10th

July, 1997) said that:

*Yes, I can see where your at .... I like that idea you said somewhere of spirituality as a continual wrestling with questions and answers and doubts, which the answer to one informs the next question and so on.*

I'm amused when Frank wonders about Jack Whitehead (my Ph.D. supervisor) being so sure that I am

*looking at the affective dimensions of life and holistic human development .... and so forth. You're already doing it' .... that word, 'know' I picked up on .... a part of me was thinking: 'How does Ben bloody well, know?' .... Another part of me was saying: 'No, Ben has come to a sense of this. It's real. He's stating something that is come from within.'*

Frank also felt that I had achieved a goodly amount of freedom:

*I like (the) 'I claim the right to be guided by the promptings of my own inner nature and to attend to my own and not others' perceptions' .... I mean that's freedom!*

George, another of my religious congregation leaders, felt (11th July 1997) that:

*Here was a search .... the honesty struck me very strongly .... your fragility comes out that you're very sensitive to your own feelings; inhibited by them (but) rejoice in them at times.*

But George also wondered, "Is he digging too deep?." He added, however, "that's me talking!" He refers to my

*hearing a lot of inner calls. You're saying: 'I want to be in touch with my values, my feelings, my anger, my frustrations .... get a hold of them, look at them and really get to know them. And in doing so I'll know myself and so I'll get to know God.' You're right .... I got the impression that 99% of getting to know God was getting to know yourself.*

George also spoke about his experience of having me to stay at his monastery in England occasionally. He said about it that:

*If I was in a small community .... you're the kind of guy I'd like in*

*the community, Who'll talk at table and enjoy the story you tell.  
You kind of chuckle as you go along .... which makes everybody  
else more aware. That's something you too should be well aware  
of, delighted with.*

Finally, there's Jim, an old friend. He felt, after a conversation (6th June, 1997) with me that:

*spirituality is being able to be yourself .... You're being real, you're  
being real .... that there was no part of your journey, internally or  
externally that you weren't prepared to to examine and share and  
challenge. I loved it.*

Regarding my desire to live in an 'experimental' community, Jim said: "Ben, I hear you being well motivated very strongly, you know. There's a vibrancy about you, there's an up-and-doing thing about you which is marvellous." Regarding our actual conversation, Jim is appreciative of the effect on him of my presence:

*Jim        I just want to say to you that I know when we part I  
             know that I'll have got strength from the conversation.*

*Ben        It's the same for me, you know.*

*Jim        Because I know that I'm not alone in my search.*

*Ben        It is very consoling actually.*

*Jim        Consoling and at the same time, challenging .... and  
             also that I'm able to manage life.*

*What have I learnt?*

It seems to me that the anguish of my professional conflict at the college of education where I worked between 1990 and 1995 is now over, is laid to rest (chapter 5). On my spiritual journey since then (1995-1998), I have been attending to "*inner change and preparation*" (Friedman, 1976: 43) for re-entering my religious community and also the community of teachers I will be working with during the coming years. My preparation for this double reentry has involved my growth in self-knowledge and self-understanding (Au and Cannon, 1995: 3), a knowledge and understanding which has been enhanced by the

intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues I have represented in this thesis.

Intrapersonally, I have learnt and come to know what's going on inside myself: who I am, why I chose what I have chosen, what my feelings and desires were and are. I have become more self-reflective in my understanding of my life. I believe that I have gradually changed from being ego-centred to being other-centred.

### 3. My spiritual journey is moving me towards helping to create community

Interpersonally, I have learnt from my reflections in this chapter on my relationships with those in the Bath action research community and with some of my fellow religious. And I learnt from Merton. With my learning from others, including Merton, I now want to concentrate on the issue of integrating within it their views on the 'personal' and 'community' of Fielding (1998), and Fielding on Macmurray (1998), and also some of the views of Jean Vanier (1993). One of the aims of my attempt at integration is to see, at least in embryonic conceptual form, what creating community anew might look as I face reentry to my religious community and to the community of teachers with whom I will be working during the years ahead.

#### *Reflecting anew on the meaning of community*

Helping me to reflect anew on the meaning of community is a heartfelt visionary statement below by Macmurray (in Fielding, 1998: 18) which resonates deeply within me:

*The first priority in education - if by education we mean learning to be human - is learning to live in personal relation to other people. Let us call it learning to live in community. I call this the first priority because failure in this is fundamental failure, which cannot be compensated for by success in other fields; because our ability to enter into fully personal relations with others is the*

*measure of our humanity. For inhumanity is precisely the perversion of human relations.*

### *The centrality of community*

For Macmurray, community isn't about a thing, place or group. It is about "*what it is to be and become human*" (1993: 211). I can't talk about community without talking about being and becoming human. He puts it like this:

*We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the other is the central and crucial fact of personal existence .... Here is the basic fact of our human condition.*

Macmurray insists "*that we are not primarily social beings; rather, we are, first and foremost, communal beings.*" And 'communal' is more fundamental than 'social' (Fielding, 1998: 2). In terms of social relations, my encounters with others tend to be functional in which I get something done, in order to achieve a particular purpose. In contrast, "*personal relations of community are not aspectual, task specific or role defined; rather they are expressive of who we are as persons*" (Fielding: 1998: 3). An example of the difference between functional and personal relations is friendship. In a friendship the common purposes arise from caring for one another and delighting in one another's company.

### *A friend is one who is in the light*

According to Ferder (1988: 171) "*friendship comes from the heart, not (from) sharing information.*" And she adds that:

*Genuine friendship does not develop when there are real or perceived inequalities among people. It does not develop when there is informational disclosure but no self-disclosure.*

She feels that a friend is one who is in the light - who has listened to my ideas, heard my growing convictions, shared my moments of

excitement, walked through the darkness of my feelings of discouragement, celebrated my questions and my joys, my insights and my breakthroughs! Who has experienced my core and has come to know some of the real essence within. Who, hearing my disclosures, has changed from an acquaintance to a friend! For Vanier (1993:13), being within friendship, within community helps me to become *"earthed and (to) find (my) identity."*

Community is not about what Fielding (ibid) calls, *"the residual, but unsatisfactory, core of belonging and significance,"* which Vanier (ibid, p. 14) echoes when he says that:

*We want to belong to a group, but we fear a certain death .... because we may not be seen as unique .... we fear being used, manipulated, smothered and spoiled.*

What then is community about? It is about *"the principle of freedom and the principle of equality."* Each of which *"have a mutually reinforcing relation with one another,"* as Macmurray (1950: 74) puts it when he says that:

*equality and freedom, as constitutive principles of fellowship, condition one another reciprocally. Equality is a condition of freedom in human relations. For if we do not treat one another as equals, we exclude freedom from the relationship. Freedom, too, conditions equality. For if there is constraint between us there is fear; and to counter the fear we must seek control over its object, and attempt to subordinate the other person to our own power. Any attempt to achieve freedom without equality, or to achieve equality without freedom, must, therefore be self-defeating.*

*Freedom within community may involve conflict*

According to Macmurray (In Fielding, 1998) freedom is to do with being ourselves, which we can only achieve in and through relationships with others, and only in certain kinds of relations, by which Macmurray meant that they are *"constituted and maintained by mutual affection"* (Macmurray, 1993: 158). Friendship or community

*reveals the positive nature of freedom. It provides the only*



*condition which releases the whole self into activity and so enables a man to be himself totally without constraint (ibid.*

Vanier (1993: 22) too comments on freedom, but in the context of contradiction within community when conflict arises, when he says:

*If community is for growth of the personal consciousness and freedom .... there will be times when some people find themselves in conflict with their community. Some out of fear of this conflict and of loneliness will refuse to follow their personal freedom and inner conscience; they choose not to 'rock the boat'. Others will choose to grow personally but the price they will have to pay will be a certain anguish and loneliness as they feel separated from the group .... This happens particularly when someone is called to personal growth and is in a group which has become lukewarm, mediocre and closed in on itself.*

Of course, I found myself in conflict with my work community (1993-1995) at the college where I worked. It seemed to me then and now, too, that the community had difficulty in accepting that I, as leader, should be allowed to do things differently so that I could continue to be myself. The same happened me in the religious community of which, again, I was leader. In order to preserve my freedom, I wished to live a different form of life from that of the vast bulk of my community so that I could grow and develop as a person. Because I separated myself at least mentally from my community, I experienced a certain amount of anguish and loneliness. I now feel, however, that I needed to experience more openness than the community could grant. The feelings of anguish and loneliness which I experienced as a result of the closed nature of the community were, I now feel, necessary in order for me to develop as a person.

*With mutual affection in friendship / community there is also struggle*

My experience tells me that, while genuinely holding "mutual affection," "love, care, concern for the other," as I try hard to do with Marion, Valerie, John, David and others in my studies of singularity, nevertheless there is, as Vanier (1993: 28) puts it,

*always warfare in our hearts; there is always the struggle*

*between pride and humility, hatred and love, forgiveness and the refusal to forgive, truth and the concealment of truth, openness and closedness.*

Like Vanier (1993: 28), I have always wanted to walk

*in that passage towards liberation, growing on the journey towards wholeness and healing.*

My intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues show me, I believe, attempting to be liberated, to become whole, when, for example, I examine - at least to some extent - what Peck (1983: 260-263) calls the

*source of (my) prejudices, hidden hostilities, irrational fears, perceptual blind spots, mental ruts, and resistance to growth.*

In chapter 2, Marion, for example, reminded me of my possible prejudices, perceptual blind spots, and so on, when, on one occasion, I gave her inappropriate advice regarding what her colleague, Valerie, should do! Perhaps, also, my preconceived opinions, my biases were on display in part of my educative relationship with John in chapter 3. He was intent on improving learning and teaching within his classrooms so that among other things, his students could achieve worthwhile examination results in the State Examinations. My concern was based on my strong views from my past when I was a secondary teacher, that my students needed and deserved to be involved in their own learning. John's students 'were 'incurious', I told him. "Knowledge," I felt, "should be a tool for them to enable them to understand their own world and make informed judgments on it!" I added, though, that: "Neither John nor I were wrong" - but I could have perhaps put my views with more finesse, with more sensitivity. My passion for my own values, buried in my biases, perhaps blinkered me for a few moments!

With David in chapter 4, I found myself constantly moving dialectically between warm regard and respect for him with impatience that he couldn't see what I saw - the necessity for freedom for his students - and more reflection on his part! Then

being taken aback when I realised he had offered democracy and freedom to his students. Not only that, but being astonished when he told me that I, too, had offered him the freedom he personally needed. As he said:

*By opening every door and by not being doctrinaire about issues, you made me feel that I could say anything that comes into my head and that it would be viewed constructively.*

Maybe my "*perceptual blind spots*" were sometimes about not recognising when I was myself practising what I recommended to others - freedom. So, in attempting to help others attain freedom, I have had to attend to how I was myself attaining it too.

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the work I had to do in order to get rid of my "*mental ruts, and resistance to growth*" when I had difficulty recognising what Jack saw in me: "*when I'm in contexts with (Ben) .... I see others come alive because of his presence.*" Opening up publicly about why I got stuck in my writing liberated me not only to get back to writing but also to putting my feelings of unworthiness to rest. So, I ended up genuinely holding affection, love, care, concern for myself as well as the other - a part of my new learning on my way to forming community anew with teachers and others.

### *The personal is more important than the functional*

There is a differential between the functional and the personal. The personal is prior to and more important than the functional, but neither can do without the other. They are, in fact, necessary to each other, but both of them are in constant tension making it very difficult to establish "*a right and satisfactory relation between them*" (Macmurray, 1941a: 1) either in society or at the level of individual living. My experience at the college of education where I worked amply bore out Macmurray's view that the personal and the functional are in constant tension making it difficult to establish "*a right and satisfactory relation between them.*" This was particularly true for me between 1993 and 1995 when I was leader of an action

research project (chapter 5).

*Human purposes are at the centre of our educational concerns*

Macmurray (1941d: 822) declares that:

*The personal is primary and the functional is secondary .... The meaning of the functional lies in the personal and not the other way around .... The functional life is for the personal life.*

Regarding education, Macmurray says that: "*human purposes are at the centre of our professional concerns.*"

I am now all too conscious that I have to play my part in ensuring with others that the religious community life I return to prioritises friendship and community over how it 'should' be run and 'organised.' Similarly, I wish to work towards the same ideals of community over organisation with the teachers with whom I will be working.

*How the personal is both transformed and transformative*

According to Fielding (1998: 7), just as the functional life is for the personal life, so "*the personal life is through the functional life.*" If community is to be a lived reality it must express itself in action "*when in our daily work we provide for one another's needs and rejoice that we are doing so*" (Macmurray, 1941e: 856). According to Fielding, then, (ibid), the functional is necessary because it is through it that the personal, the standpoint of the community, becomes real and authentic. The personal is therefore foundational, but it is particularly important to reveal the personal in the functional. When the functional comes under the aegis of the personal, that is, when the functional is expressive of the personal, it is both transformed and transformative.

## *The personal as transformational*

In summarising his argument, Fielding (1998: 9) says that:

*not only is the personal foundational, the functional for the sake of the personal, and the personal articulated through the functional, but the functional within the personal is transformed.*

Fielding (1998: 12) argues for "education as transformative community," which is a context that informs what we do, "an aspiration, a means of proceeding, and an increasingly encountered reality." He goes on to say that:

*education is at once a profoundly personal undertaking, that is to say one that is ultimately about human being and becoming, and also an undertaking that is, if not utopian, then infused with hope. It is a shared sense that education is expressive of positive human agency and shared hope in the future of human kind. It is about education as transformative community.*

## *Education as Transformative community*

How have I moved forward Fielding's view of "Education as Transformative Community"? I'll point to two examples, one in chapter 2 and the other in terms of my future work. Valerie in chapter 2 was able, in my view, to offer worthwhile freedom to her student, Rose, by encouraging her to write about her concerns and come to her own conclusions. That surely was an expression of egalitarianism, perhaps not in its fullest form but certainly, I would suggest, in a form suitable for a student. Rose availed of it to express her freedom. According to Macmurray (1950: 74), freedom and egalitarianism are the "two fundamental principles of community." I would therefore suggest that Rose's education was transformative in that it was "at once a profoundly personal undertaking," "ultimately about being and becoming" and one "infused with hope" (Fielding, 1998: 12). But overall in my thesis I believe I have shown how I have striven with the teachers I worked with to bring about egalitarianism and freedom, and succeeded at least to some extent. It was educational work in which I believe I kept "human purposes" at the centre. I

believe that I have shown in the thesis, too, how I am myself becoming more free and am achieving equality with those with whom I deal. A development for teachers and for myself that is both personal and transformative.

*I am committed to creating community*

I want to look again at Fielding's (1998: 12) view of education as transformative community, this time through the lens of a professed member of a religious congregation. Being in community of whatever kind is about personal relations, about being in relationship with others. That is my hope for the future. It is my hope as a member of a religious congregation. I want 'community' to be more and more about personal relations, about being in relationship with others.

But what does being *in* religious community life offer me? It offers me a context in which my life decision to be available to others in educative and personal relationship is grounded. It offers me a stable setting. It creates for me a stimulus to action. It sets out a place where I may help to bring about necessary compromise. My need to hold on to my own individuality, for example, is constantly and dialectically challenged by being a member of two communities, my religious community and my community at work. This dialectic between my individuality and my membership of community is necessary for me, I believe, if I am to move ever closer to personal integration.

When I entered a religious congregation or community and became a brother in 1957 I saw myself, like Merton (1948: 372), "*enclosed in the four walls of my new freedom.*" The four walls represented my willingness to accept limitations on my freedom for a greater 'good'; the greater good being my need to offer a sacrifice of self-abnegation to my God, as current Catholic theology then understood it. Later in life I began to realise that these 'four walls' needed to come down if I were to achieve maturity and integration. I now knew I needed sufficient freedom in order to begin to reveal and discover my true

self. My growing understanding of that freedom, enabling me to become my true self, has taken concrete shape over the years in relationship with others through freedom and love. And the vows that I have taken over all these years are no longer bonds, they are gifts enabling me to become more free, enabling me to love more. And the names of the vows have changed, too, to mirror that new meaning.

The vow of chastity has, for example, become "*a vow for relatedness*" (O Murchu (1995: 102). Jane, Chris, Robyn, Moira and others earlier in this chapter above noticed my gift for relatedness. The vow of poverty has, for example, become "*a vow for stewardship*" (O Murchu (1995: 111). And I link this vow with hospitality. The vow of obedience has become "*a vow for partnership*" (O Murchu, 1995: 114). My exercise of my vowed life in my religious community life and in my life of community with others in education is, for me, not unlike what Macmurray (1991:14-15) means when he says that: "*All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship.*"

#### *A summary of the significance for me of the 'living' spiritual ideas of others*

This chapter was written in an improvisatory way but, in retrospect, seems to me to fall into three sections as follows: 1. *Understanding myself as a person through the eyes of Merton*; 2. *Achieving self-realisation: learning from others, and they from me*; 3. *My spiritual journey is moving me towards helping to create community*

##### *1. Understanding myself as a person through the eyes of Merton*

My encounter with the life and writings of Thomas Merton has, I believe, enriched both my interior life and my life in my religious community, my work life and my life in relationship with others. For example, I have learnt to value "*experience*" over "*speculation*," and

*"poetry and intuition" over "technical language."*

Like Merton, my eyes have been opened over the years to my own humanity. I have engaged in the process of finding my own 'true' identity and in preserving my individuality in order to be a person of integrity. My prose poem at the end of chapter 5 points in the same direction. In practice, I am committed to finding my identity and preserving my integrity through my exercise of freedom and love towards others in my educative relationships. In my efforts to become contemplative I realise that what I have been doing is to see things as they really are; a perspective that causes me to want to treat each person I meet as being unique.

My relationship with Merton causes me also to wish to take responsibility for my own life which will be a sign of my growing spirituality. As Merton (1955: xii) puts it: *"in the last analysis the individual person is responsible for living his own life and for 'finding himself'."*

In order to pursue my personal goals, my values, I have to become an enquirer; like Merton, I have to ask questions. I have to come to realise that some uncertainty is necessary in order for me to continue as an enquirer who has an open mind. Whenever I become anxious it is a sign to me that I have further questions to ask. Over the years, too, following Merton, I have come to deny tradition its hold over me, realising that it isn't healthy for me to accept tradition blindly. I learn from Merton that *"causing disturbance in others' mind"* is no bad thing. It leads me to holding *"a dialectic of care and challenge"* in my relationships with others.

## *2. Achieving self-realisation: learning from others, and they from me*

Along the way I meet my friend, Larry. I meet him again just before his death. The inevitability of my own death now stares me in the face, causing me to concentrate on the *"time-left-to-live."* I do so, holding in mind the memory of Larry's profound simplicity, enormous



freedom from sadness and terror, and his peacefulness and courage as values I, too, can embody in my life.

However, in my journey towards my self-realisation, I meet an unresolved crisis from my past. It revolves around my "UNWORTHINESS" and around the notion of "AUTHORITY." It prevents me from writing for some months. With Judi Marshall's help *"I started letting go of these words .... (that) seemed to be controlling mechanisms."* And I begin to write again. Like Merton (Padovano, 1984: 170-171), I believe that the resolution of this crisis has to do with becoming *"passionate about preserving (my) own individuality;"* that *"nothing is ultimately more sacred than the integrity of (my) own spirit,"* and that I should become *"a pawn in no system."* If I am to offer freedom and love to others I first have to offer freedom to myself, to love myself.

My experience in Bexham School helps me to accept 'failure', but it is a 'failure' that I insist in explaining for myself! After this experience of failure, I give a seminar at the University of Bath on *"Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?"* It is literally the first occasion in my life when I hear others telling me the qualities I have to offer others. I am astonished and very moved at quotations such as the following: *"It's just amazing, sort of the care and the empathy ... that you actually show to other people"; "I know he does live his values";* that I use *"poetic forms of communication"* - these moments, as Paul says, are where *"he (Ben) was talking with his heart rather than thinking with his head."*

My explanation of my thesis and of my *"intimacy"* imaginary dialogues at another meeting at the University of Bath confirms for me the positive effect I am having educatively on other people. I am attempting to summarise it here in two quotations:

*How often do we have discussions like this with other human beings in our lives. I think it's quite rare, isn't it?*

And,

*Now, if you ask what does it mean to be a 'good' listener, there's a complete shift of emphasis and meaning .... That seems to me to be very related to why Robyn would feel that immediate rapport in the sense of Ben being not just a good listener in those terms of listening well, but a good person who is listening well.*

My gradual understanding of what I have to offer others educatively enables me to move from alienation from my own religious community to reaffiliation.

### *3. My spiritual journey is moving me towards helping to create community*

My later engagement in this chapter with Fielding (1998) and his views on Macmurray's notion of "*community*" are, I believe, the *lexical* meanings of what I have already described and explained *ostensively* earlier in the middle part of the chapter. Fielding and Macmurray (in Fielding, 1998: 18) emphasise the importance of community, meaning "*personal relations*," that is, "*what it is to be and become human*" (Macmurray, 1993: 211). In these "*personal relations*", the values of freedom and love play an increasingly important part. By the end of the chapter I come to realise, by virtue of my membership of religious community life and by my profession of vows for relatedness, hospitality and partnership, that I have publicly promised to embody the values of freedom and love in how I connect the personal with the professional in my life of relationship with others - and that I am actually doing so.

## Chapter 7

### *How do I now understand my educational development in the light of my thesis question - “How do I come to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory?”*

I use this last chapter to help my reader to understand my educational development as I came to know my spirituality in creating my own living educational theory. To this end I have divided the chapter into 2 sections, each of whose headings is italicised and underlined. The sub-headings that occur under the main headings are italicised but not underlined. The main headings are as follows:

- 1. Coming to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory* (p. 294)
- 2. Looking to the future, the way forward* (p. 324)

#### *1. Coming to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory*

At the heart of my research and thesis is the notion of ‘valuing’. Let me look briefly at how Fukuyama (1992: 189) sees the notions of valuing when he says:

*What constituted the essence of man was the act of valuing itself, of giving oneself worth and demanding recognition for it.*

Human beings need a “sense of self-worth,” Fukuyama (1992: 181) declares, and it can only be satisfied by being recognised. Unless an individual possesses some sense of self-worth, of self-respect, they won’t really be able to function properly in the world, they won’t really be satisfied with their lives. It is only by possessing self-worth, for example, that individuals are able to say “no” to others without self-reproach. Individuals equate a sense of self-worth with a desire, not for superiority, but for recognition as the equal of others. An

individual, in describing their personal goals, in describing their desire for recognition (p. 190), uses words like “*dignity*,” “*respect*,” “*self-respect*,” and “*self-esteem*.” For me, these values are at the heart of my action research enquiry in my encounters with others and in my demand for dignity, for respect in the college where I worked from 1990 to 1995 (chapter 5). I also accept that these values were at the heart of others’ unspoken requests of me in our educational encounters, as we <sup>were</sup> attempting to improve what we were doing.

Agreeing with Fukuyama (1992), I also follow Ilyenkov (1982, in Whitehead, 1993: 54), who takes ‘value’ to be the human goal for the sake of which I struggle to give my life its particular form. In respect of the research I have undertaken, which this thesis describes and explains, I accept that my experience of the negation of my values, especially, values of freedom (embracing self-worth) and love, has helped my action research enquiry to move forward.

I use the notion of valuing and of values to explain my own educational development. Following Whitehead (1993: 54), I agree that values link theory and practice. I agree that a theory should be able to answer questions about why things happen. Whitehead’s (1989) idea of ‘living educational theory’ sets out how the ‘why’ question can be answered. It can be answered in terms of ‘value’. Traditional forms of educational theory, on the other hand (see chapter 1 for the BERA Code of Practice for Writers), do not adequately explain an individual’s educational development.

### *My personal/ethical standards of judgment*

I come now to my unit of appraisal (Whitehead, 1989: 54), which is my claim to know my own educational development and how it is to be judged by the academy. I am offering my values as my principal standards of judgment by which my claim to know my own educational development can at least be partly judged. My personal values, as standards of judgment, are those of freedom and love, which I exercise by connecting the personal with the professional in

my explanations of my educative relationships with others.

In each of my studies of singularity, and particularly at the ends of chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 in considering my claims to knowledge, I have shown how I have embodied my values of freedom and love in my practice of improving what I am doing.

### *My social standards of judgment*

My social values are the standards of judgment or criteria put forward by Habermas (1976, in Whitehead, 1993: 55) by which I engaged in a process of reaching understanding with others. I detailed its meaning in chapter 1. In using these standards I have wanted my reader to be able to assess my authenticity in whether I have expressed my intentions truthfully (Habermas, 1976) in justifying my values, especially those of freedom and love, as I gave form to my life in education. I am now claiming that my authenticity was realised at least to some extent throughout my studies of singularity and in my writing of this thesis and that the evidence is contained in my own judgments and in the words of others as they commended me for what I had brought to them. It bears out Habermas's view (in Whitehead, 1993: 55) that:

*in the interaction it will be shown in time, whether the other side is 'in truth or honestly' participating or is only pretending to engage in communicative action.*

### *My methodological standards of judgment*

I used Winter's principles of rigour (1989: 38-70) in my enquiries. They were Reflexive and Dialectical Critique, Collaborative Resource, Risk, Plurality of Structure, and Theory, Practice, Transformation. I would, however, have preferred more emphasis in these standards on values as being central to the kind of action research I was doing. But then these principles weren't specifically designed to help me judge my educational claims in my own thesis. As I said in chapter 1,

I mainly used principles that grew from my thesis as it were, just as my theory grew from my practice.

My principles of rigour, my methodological standards of judgment, that grew from my thesis, were specifically to do with offering my thesis as a form of improvisatory self-realisation which, nevertheless, included a disciplined description that integrated both an 'intra'-subjective and an 'inter'-subjective dialectic. The 'intra'-subjective dialogues I conducted with myself enabled me to understand my meaning-making for myself. The 'inter'-subjective dialogues I conducted with others, including my reader, enabled me to represent my meaning-making to them. Both the 'intra'-subjective and the 'inter'-subjective dialectics involved question and answer, contradictions and tensions, which helped to move me forward through my imagined possibilities, my actions and evaluation of them, and through the action research enquiry cycles (see the Whitehead action research cycle above, p. 14).

I now want to show the rigour with which I used the action research cycle (Whitehead, 1985; and chapter 1: 14). To avoid doing what could become a too rational, linear search, I intend concentrating only on my educative relationship with Marion in chapter 2.

### *1) What was my concern?*

My concern regarding Marion was two-fold. In the first place I wanted to accept, affirm and confirm her. I believed that this approach was 'right' in itself. I also hoped, however, that so acting towards Marion would enable her more confidently to answer questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" and "How do I live out my values in my practice?" (Whitehead, 1993), as she endeavoured to help her colleague, Valerie, with Valerie's action research enquiry. Regarding my first aim above, Marion seemed to recognise that this was how I was trying to treat her when she told me (chapter 2: 48) that:

*The way you were trying to treat me was actually the way I was trying to treat the children .... Person-centred and so on .... And*

*that the other person is unique.*

The second part of my two-fold concern for Marion was that she would take up a new role, that of tutor, to a colleague on her own staff. And as I said (chapter 2):

*I never specified what the role of tutor should be .... I felt confidence in Marion that she would be able to do so once she got over her temporary lack of confidence in herself. In order to inspire confidence in her I emphasised that her values weren't really new-found; that she always had them but was perhaps rediscovering them .... All of this, I felt, would give her courage and convince her of her ability to take on her new role.*

## *2) Why was I concerned?*

I was concerned that Marion would feel not only accepted, affirmed and confirmed by me verbally, but that in being able to help her colleague, Valerie, she would realise her own gifts and talents. And so, like Marion, I wondered how I could help her to overcome her fears, for example: "What if I'm not able for it? What if I don't possess the necessary skills to help Valerie in her research?," and, "The unknown can be a bit scary. The feeling of not being in control makes me nervous."

I was also concerned to embody my values of freedom and love in my relationship with Marion.

## *3) What did I think I could do about my concerns?*

I felt that if I could find a way of convincing Marion that she had learnt a huge amount about her values from doing her previous (1992-1993) action research enquiry, then, she might feel less inhibited about what she not only had to offer her own students, but that there might be transferability between how she treated her students and how she might help her colleague, Valerie. And so I told her that:

*I like the way you are sure of your values now, ones like wanting your "classroom to be a happy democratic place" where you*

*wanted your pupils "to participate confidently in class discussions" and that "a good rapport" couldn't exist "without mutual trust, understanding and respect ...."*

I also felt I had to convince her that not only was she overtly practising her values, but that this fact should give her courage and convince her of her ability to take on her new role as a tutor to Valerie:

*I'm not surprised you want to share the exciting classroom experiences you have had with Valerie. More than that I think you have rediscovered a lot of qualities, values, etc .... I detect also a new-found confidence in your own abilities. I say: rejoice in that.*

I felt I ought also to commend Marion on admitting her insecurities - I felt it was part of her deep humanity and that this very humility would help put Valerie at her ease.

*I like the way you admitted your insecurities and I think I picked up that you would be willing to talk to Valerie about these even if you wondered if this would make her sceptical and doubtful of your capacity to support her, given what you consider to be your apparent lack of confidence.*

#### **4) What did I do about my concerns?**

Though I had little doubt that Marion intuitively knew what to do, I felt I should initially offer whatever help I could in order to try and allay whatever fears she might still retain about her <sup>own</sup> capacity to undertake this task. I also wanted to get her started in a practical way on tutoring Valerie.

So I decided to choose a section of the Self-Me Dialogue Marion had given me early in our educative relationship that year. Having picked out certain words and phrases that resonated with me as being important both from Marion's, Valerie's and my points of view, I formulated questions for Marion to ask Valerie that I felt would be useful in getting Valerie started on her own action enquiry.

I felt that basing the questions on Marion's own words from her imaginary dialogue would enhance the quality of them in her eyes.



Because the questions were based on her words, I felt that very fact would give her courage to tutor her colleague, Valerie. I was always aware, however, that my questions might be inept, might not be as near the scene of the action as I would have liked. However, I also knew that Marion would make her own choice from my questions, would also change them around to suit herself. I will not repeat my questions here - they are in the body of my text in chapter 2.

*5) What kind of 'evidence' did I collect to help me to make some judgment about what was happening?*

One kind of 'evidence' I could collect would be around how I accepted, affirmed and confirmed Marion; to do with the quality of my encounter with her, based as it was on my embodiment of my values of freedom and love. I will comment on this 'evidence' under my last action research question below.

There was a 'technical' side to the kind of 'evidence' that I would collect, too, of course. It was to do with having 'relevant' questions for Marion to put to Valerie, as, for example, *"What is the relevance of Religion to you (Valerie)?* Such a question was designed to draw out the values that informed Valerie's practice. And there was the question of the relevance of R.E. to Valerie's students: *"What is its relevance to your students?" "Do they, in fact, regard religion as a second-class subject?"*

Other kinds of evidence had to do with the criteria Valerie would choose to pick the class she would work with; with what form her 'frustration' with her classes had taken; with the kind of feedback that she would like to get from her students.

*6) How did I collect such 'evidence'?*

It was Marion who collected and shared her evidence with me, over time, around the questions she had posed to Valerie in order to help Valerie's action research enquiry to move forward.

7) *How did I check that my judgment about what had happened was reasonably fair and accurate?*

I believe my questions helped both Marion and Valerie in their separate though linked enquiries. I saw that answers to many of my questions surfaced within Marion's and Valerie's accounts of what they had done. In what briefly follows, I italicise and underline a word in each paragraph which was taken from the questions I posed to Marion for Valerie (a fuller treatment is given in chapter 1, section one). These words and the questions within which they appeared pointed to my educative influence with Marion. It was an influence underpinned for me by my efforts to embody my values of care and freedom in my support to her. My support had use-value for Marion and she gladly accepted it.

Regarding one of my questions based on 'frustration', Valerie felt that as an R.E. teacher, she never got public feedback on how she performed. But she was also concerned about *"the way pupils behaved whenever a Bible or the word Jesus was introduced in the class."*

Valerie needed to seek 'evidence' in her practice about how she was 'performing'. She decided to tape one of her classes of R.E. When she audio-taped her class, she *"couldn't believe the noise level"* and she discovered that she talked more than she had thought she did, at times *"even interrupting the students' answers."*

Valerie was worried, though, about the relevance, about the efficacy of her subject, R.E., and asked plaintively, *"Was anyone listening? Did R.E. have any relevance to the pupils lives at all or was my teaching all for nothing and had no value for the pupils?"*

The main criterion Valerie decided for her enquiry was to choose class '5:33' to work with because they caused her most difficulty in the classroom. She had been teaching morality, particularly what she called *"life issues."* And as she said: *"Each day I would give a varied input on the topic and get feedback ...."* This 'evidence' enabled Valerie

to make a judgment about what was happening. It was one of her ways of applying her criteria.

With Marion's help, a solution for her concerns gradually emerged for Valerie. She gradually moved from her sense of frustration. She found she had gradually moved from "*being the centre of debate*;" she was taking "*a less vocal role*" and was beginning to "*gradually throw back the arguments of individual pupils to the rest of the class.*"

Valerie's evaluated her success by offering the following criteria: she felt her class was "*enjoying their classroom activities because of group work*" and they were less negative. She now felt "*more in control*" because she had "*developed a relationship with the class.*"

Let me now evaluate the 'evidence' and the outcomes of my actions regarding the quality of my support for Marion. She told me (4th February, 1994) that: "*I was really afraid I wouldn't be any use in this new type of role*" (of tutoring Valerie), but that "*you immediately answered, giving me encouragement and advice.*" She added that this was "*a lifeline for me and helped me to decide how to work with Valerie in her enquiry.*"

Regarding the nature of the help Marion felt I had given her, she said that I had: *the ability to ask very pertinent questions which help to focus on concerns and develop responses ....*" Marion also felt her tutoring had improved "*because you persuaded me to write.*" She felt that: "*you constantly nudged me on! I might be guilty of procrastination if I were allowed just to be;*" that I had given her constant "*encouragement and advice.*" She also felt that my questions "*really probed much deeper than mine.*"

It seems to me that the quality of my encounter with Marion bore out what I said about trying to embody my values in my practice. Marion, too, seemed to me to concur. For those reasons, I believe I am now able to say of my concern to show care, that:

*My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears*

*as is humanly possible.*

And similarly regarding freedom, I believe I have offered evidence to substantiate my claim that:

*I go about the work of trying to remove fears by finding out the gifts and qualities the other has and then commenting on them positively. I do so not just because I believe it's the right thing to do. I do so because I feel very strongly that others are in constant need of appreciation, as I am myself.*

### *Modifying my concerns, ideas and actions*

But what of Whitehead's (1993: 54) last action research cycle step - *"I modify my problems (concerns), ideas and actions in the light of my evaluation."*?

In a subsequent study of singularity (chapter 4), I found out that the rational, linear form of the action research cycle didn't always help the person I was supporting in an action enquiry. In helping David to deal, for example, with his anxieties about classroom discipline, I eventually found out that his imagination was gripped by my imaginative telling of my 'conflict' at the college where I was leader of an action research project (1993-1995). I hypothesised that perhaps a greater use of imagination might have moved David *further* forward than my persistent and insistent use of the action research cycle. That led me to appose an interior monologue, which I had previously composed, with my study of singularity about David (chapter 4).

The use of my imagination became useful to me, too, in another way. My imaginative forms of representation, such as an interior monologue, my use also of many imaginary dialogues and my use of free verse, helped me to both reveal my feelings and to deal with them when they were sometimes too subjective for me. But when I come to the use-value of my action enquiry below I will return to the very important topic of the use of feelings and emotions.

### *My aesthetic standard of judgment*

In chapter 1 I called on my readers to 'indwell' (Holbrook, 1980, in Whitehead, 1993: 58) with me by being empathic to what I had described and explained about the form of my life which I presented in my claims to knowledge. Through using "*delicate intuitions, imagination and respect*" (Russell, 1916, in Whitehead, 1993: 58), readers might be able to offer a judgment on whether I had succeeded in presenting my life in a form that did justice to the quality of the relationships that I said I had been involved in creating with teachers and others. These were relationships within which I was connecting the personal with the professional as I embodied my values of love and freedom in how I improved what I was doing (chapters, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

### *Coming to understand my spirituality*

In coming to know my spirituality as I created my own living educational theory, I attempted in my studies of singularity to represent not the surface features of others and myself but, rather, our expressive character (Eisner, 1994: 52). I attempted to show from my relationships with others that what was most important was not what was apparent, but, instead, what was felt about what was apparent. Following Stake (1995: 86), I maintained that my form of representation in my thesis offered "*vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves,*" even if I felt that I wouldn't wish to go as far as using Stake's phrase, "*so well constructed*"; "*well constructed*" would do me. In any case, Stake's statement is an important one for me because it gives an indication of the use-value my thesis may have for others. I will return to that point below later and support it with evidence.

I experimented in my thesis, then, with different ways of representing different meanings because different ways of representing allowed, I felt, for different forms of understanding to be shared with others (Eisner, 1993: 6). And so I experimented with an interior monologue, with various imaginary dialogues and even with free verse, so that I

might be able to express the kind of emotional life that, for me, is inextricably interwoven in how I embodied my values with others as I attempted to improve what I was doing. I believe that my communication of my emotional life, which motivated me in my embodiment of my values of love and freedom, had use-value for my readers also. Below I offer some tentative evidence that this is the case.

But let me now move forward my spiritual concerns by considering two issues: some meanings to the word 'spiritual'; and the meaning of 'improvement' in connection with the spiritual in questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*"

*Some meanings that help me to understand what the 'spiritual' means to me*

In coming to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory, I am helped by considering the meanings of *creating*, *'healing'* and *transcending* (Lealman, in Best [Ed], 1996: 20-29). I am helped also by considering the meanings of being a *'spectator'*, but not an *'observer'*.

My form of spirituality needed an opportunity for *creating*. In creating my thesis I was, for example, able to affirm my own experiences, both intra-subjectively and inter-subjectively. In acting creatively I was able to communicate not so much a quantity of factual information - though that was included - but my living and dynamic expression of my experiences as I embodied my values in my connecting of the personal with the professional in my efforts to improve my practice. In attempting to be aesthetically creative in my thesis I was also making allowances for those aspects of my consciousness which intellectual and academic life don't always take into account - intuition, reverence, awe, seeing, and acceptance of tentativeness and ambiguity in connection with myself and others. Being involved in the creation of my thesis helped me, I believe, to adopt a more open approach to life, in that by denying cynicism a place, I was able

to trust more in the growing possibilities of connecting personally and professionally with others.

In talking about '*healing*', I am essentially talking about making 'whole'. In being involved personally and professionally with others as we were improving what we were doing, I have always believed that we were also attempting to become whole. And becoming whole was principally for me to do with relating, participating and connecting. And let me concentrate a little on what I mean by participating, by being a participant. In doing so, I want to lightly use one of Marcel's (in Cooney [ed.], 1989: i-xviii) philosophical ideas to make my point. In pursuing his philosophical research, Marcel speaks of two kinds of researcher, the 'participant' and the 'spectator'. (*Note*: While using the singular form of the nouns, 'participant' and 'spectator' below, I will not accompany these nouns with the personal pronouns 'he or she', but my own 'I', or alternatively, the plural form 'they' with the singular forms of the nouns, 'participant' and 'spectator').

As a '*participant*' I was immersed in relationship with my fellow human beings, I '*felt*' relationship. Feeling rather than seeing was necessary for me. Feeling was an active relation between me as a participant and those I encountered. Feeling was, in fact, 'a mode of participation' and it involved the practice of my values. In my action research enquiry I was a 'participant', endeavouring to be 'present' to others personally and professionally through how I embodied my values as I was giving a shape to my life in education. I was using feeling as an active relation between myself and those I encountered in relationship. I tried to operate from *within* rather than from without. In my conversations with others in relationship, I tried to practise fidelity in that I made endless efforts to understand the other in the give-and-take of conversation. To some extent I tried to hold the other present to my heart and mind *within* me, participating in a bond with the other. I knew, of course, that coming into one another's 'presence' could - and did - cause difficulty; that we needed to break one another's rules to do so (Tschumi in Biesta, 1998: 17; Ellsworth, 1997: 1-2).

I endeavoured to recognise that others were mysteries and so I knew I couldn't separate myself from them. I was a mystery myself relating to others as mystery. In dealing with people as mysteries I realised that I wasn't involved in trying to solve 'problems'. On the contrary, my stance was one of awe and wonder in the presence of mystery. Of course, I was also a 'living contradiction' and did not live out my values as well as I might. But where my encounters were real I got glimpses of the sanctity of life.

If I had been but a '*spectator*', according to Marcel (ibid), I would just be observing, be curious, be detached. My role as observer would be properly played out in what Marcel calls the realm of the "*problematical*." I would be seeing people as problems. By seeing people as problems I would be seeing them as external to me, as enquirer, so there would be a 'solution' to them. As '*spectator*', then, I would approach others with an attitude of curiosity. But I wouldn't be able to objectify the other because the other transcends all attempts at objectification. Because the other is not an 'object' they couldn't be 'present' to me as '*spectator*'. The most I could do as '*spectator*' regarding objects, would be to be "*next to*" or "*alongside of*" them. As '*spectator*' I would be unable to be involved in the intersubjectivity necessary for valuing. I would be closed to people. I could but record events, be an eye that is a faceless, anonymous look. In order then to be whole and help others to become whole I had to act as a participant rather than as an observer in my relationships with others, as I connected the personal with the professional.

In wanting to have the notion of the *transcendent* in my form of spirituality, I am talking about the potential for growth, for moving on, for changing, for becoming, for having a focus beyond for myself and others. None of this means that my individual 'I' is submerged, denied or surrendered. On the contrary, my 'I' is affirmed in my efforts to connect the personal and the professional with others. But in what way am I becoming transcendent in my writing my thesis? It has happened interpersonally as I learnt to be still, to be silent, to be amazed, and to wonder. In connection with silence, amazement and



wonder, let me to talk one more time about the care, compassion, freedom and joy I have tried to practise in my personal and professional relationship with others.

In my relationships with others I was often aware of, and experienced, the root meaning of care. From the Gothic, the root meaning of “kara”, or care, is *“to grieve, to experience sorrow, to cry out with”* (Nouwen, 1974: 34). These are intense feelings but they point to the necessary empathy I tried to practise.

If I never experienced grieving, sorrow or, indeed, crying out with, I don't believe I could have learned to empathise with others. In my studies of singularity, others frequently told me in their own words that I had indeed been able to empathise with them. Empathy has nothing to do with having something the other in conversation doesn't possess; it has nothing to do with possessing something that I can give to the other. Rather, I think it means risking coming into another's presence knowing that all I have is empty hands, but also knowing that being present to the other is all that really matters. I think I tried to practise that in my encounters with others. Caring is considered to be a part of compassion, which means, for me, being fully immersed in the condition of being human (Nouwen, 1982a: 4). Being compassionate and caring is a moral imperative for me.

In my 'intra'-personal dialogue ('intra' meaning within), I disposed myself to learning compassion and care as I took time to enter my 'inner sanctuary' (Nouwen, 1982b: 4) wherein I was able to create a lonely place in the middle of my actions and concerns, my successes and failures where they slowly lost their power over me. I thus created room for my concern for others. I believe I then became motivated more by the needs of others than my own. I needed, too, to live out the paradox, *“the closer you are to yourself, the closer you are to the other”* (Nouwen, 1979: 28). I got closer to myself in solitude, which stood for my desire for self-emptying when I enter encounters with others. It was like, I think, Weil's (1951: 115) notion of attention in relationship encounters, where she said that:

*This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself*

*of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this.*

Together with compassion and care, there was freedom in my relationships, but allied with freedom there was also joy. My offer of hospitality and friendship to others was what gave the tints and colours that joy feeds on. As Nouwen (1994a: 104) put it: *"joy is the secret of compassion."* For me, joy jumped out at me from those with whom I was in educative relationships. In encounters with others my hands might have been empty but not my heart. My heart became filled with the gifts others were willing to give me. In receiving, my heart filled with joy. I was aware, too, with Nouwen (1994a: 102) that:

*The joy that compassion brings is one of the best-kept secrets of humanity. It is a secret known to only a very few people, a secret that has to be rediscovered over and over again.*

The joy that compassion brings when I am in relationship with others indicates, I believe, the kind of spirit I have (Rodger, 1996, in Best [Ed], 1996: 45-63). In fact it is the things that move me - my values - that motivate me and indicate the kind of spirit I have. I would like to think that I have a loving spirit, an often peaceable spirit, a generous spirit. And I will return later below to the kind of spirit I have when assessing the use-value of my thesis to others.

### *The meaning of 'improvement' in connection with the spiritual*

The questions below that follow my main question are some possible explanations I can give for the meaning of 'improvement' in questions of the kind, *"How do I improve what I am doing?"* Does it constitute improving something in my practice that I can show through evidence? Does it constitute acting more effectively? Does it constitute growing in understanding? Does it constitute changing my understanding?

In terms of offering evidence for improvement, for effectiveness, for

growth in understanding in my action research enquiry, I believe I subscribe to Collins and McNiff's (1999: 49) view of what action research requires of its practitioners, when McNiff says that it is about accepting

*the responsibility of offering a public account of their own educational journey, of how they grew in understanding. This is, however, not a solitary journey, since no meaningful research in the human sciences can be conducted by one person separate from others.*

I undertook my action research with a view to improving the quality of life for myself and others. As a researcher I can't say that I have 'brought about' change within my human interactions because I can't justify such a claim (ibid). I can't justify it because it implies sequential cause and effect, to which I don't subscribe. The most I can say is that I have been in relation to others and have recognised my influence in those relationships (see my chapters 2,3,4,5 and 6). The only person I can change for the better is myself, and to try to make my influence count for good with others. And that is part of what I will consider now below together with the use-value of my thesis.

#### *Considering the use-value of my thesis*

At a meeting on 27th November 1995 of my action research group at the University of Bath (see chapter 6) I decided, at Jack Whitehead's instigation, to speak to the topic: "*Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?*" The issues I spoke about on a TV monitor were the following: how we were creating community at the University of Bath; was there a place for God in my life?; could I explain my national or was it, my cultural identity?; a spiritual vision - what else was there beside market forces, inflation, balance of payment deficits, materialism and so on?

At the discussion that ensued the use-value of what I said resided for Steve in my care for others, that:

*what really comes out when you start talking about other people, like your remembrances, your experiences .... sort of the care and the empathy .... that you actually show to other people. I mean I've experienced that when talking to you.*

Steve continued, concerning me, that:

*I know he does live his values. The first time I met him he sat there and gave up of his very valuable time and .... listened and talked. Right. And that's incredibly rare. People don't do that. And he does it all the time to people who he's never met. He lives out those values .... It's there. And we're all witness to that.*

Steve obviously related to me and to the value of showing care. He could relate to the quality of my care for others and, perhaps in his own practice, he wished to improve how he practised care for his students. I doubt if he would have been able to transfer his findings from my situation to situations of his own. But the merit of his observation and his articulation of his observation was that what I had done and how I had done it, had "*stimulated worthwhile thinking*" (Bassey, 1995: 111) for Steve.

Jack wanted to know if those present at the meeting had been stimulated by "*poetic forms of communication*" on my part. Here is how Jack put it:

*I'm asking whether or not there have been moments or episodes, just times this evening when there was something about the way he (Ben) was communicating which really captivated your imagination in that poetic sense .... there were moments when Ben's face lit up, there was an increased passion in his voice and I was very conscious at those moments of having my imagination gripped.*

Paul, in answering, felt that such moments as Jack had described, had occurred when "*he (Ben) was talking with his heart rather than thinking with his head.*" There were times, then, when during my articulation of what I was saying I was offering "*vicarious experiences*" to others which, as Stake (1995: 86) puts it, "*the person feels as if it happened to themselves.*" I was offering to others not what was apparent about my human experience but, instead, what was felt

about what was apparent (Eisner, 1994: 52). People were moved, I believe, by the quality of the articulation of my values, which indicated the kind of spirit I was bringing to my experiences - a loving spirit (Rodger, 1996: 48). And Steve had also seen, as he said, my loving spirit in action! Again I believe this was relatable in that it had "*stimulated worthwhile thinking*" (Bassey, 1995: 111) - and *feeling*, too, in others. What I had done was maybe something they too could do but in their own way.

Pat D'Arcy, my critical friend, some years (15th April, 1998) after she had been reading, 'correcting' and critiquing the various chapters of my thesis, said: "*I didn't originally believe that there was anything worthwhile about spirituality that I would find myself interested in. However, what you have written has convinced me to change my mind.*" This statement of Pat's wouldn't obviously have implications for generalisability, for transferability, perhaps not even for relatability, yet she was admitting that I had helped her to change her mind. That seems to me to go beyond Bassey's (ibid) notion of "*stimulating worthwhile thinking.*" Pat D'Arcy had, over time, done her own "*worthwhile thinking*" and had now come to the conclusion that I had something worthwhile to offer her. Obviously, what that was she hadn't yet articulated to herself - nor to me. However, a start had been made - Pat had *changed* her mind. And she had attributed that change of mind to me. I had been influential, then, in terms of my relationship to her (McNiff, 1999: 49).

At another University of Bath action research meeting on 12th May, 1997, I had made a further presentation (see chapter 6). This time it had to do with a series of imaginary '*Intimacy Dialogues*' that I had constructed to help me deal with my feeling of alienation from the religious congregation to which I belonged. I composed a creative question to accompany my presentation and it was as follows: "*How do I accept and reveal myself to you so that you can accept and open yourself to others?*" No doubt in the question there was an implication of transferability, that is, of "contextual similarity" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 298) between the sending context and the receiving context. Green (1999: 107), too, has a view of transferability which

she puts as follows:

*Whilst action research does not attempt to produce results that are immediately transferable to other teaching situations, that does not mean that it can have no effect beyond its particular context. In my view, it is the understandings of the complexities of the particular situation and the recognition of the different ways in which the familiar can be interpreted that is the aspect that is so readily transferable to other situations.*

I find myself having some sympathy for Green's view that "it is the understandings of the complexities of the particular situation and the recognition of the different ways in which the familiar can be interpreted that is the aspect that is so readily transferable to other situations." And yet, I feel that this latter interpretation has to be teased out in the light not of any action research, but of my action research. I obviously offer my explanation of the complexities of *my* situation and of what is familiar to *me*. I find, too, that the 'receiver' researcher responds not so much to my rational and linear explanation of 'complexities', nor to my 'interpretation of what is 'familiar', but to "*what is felt about what is not apparent*," that is, "*the kind of emotional life that (I) generate*" (Eisner, 1994: 52).

However, Green (ibid) also said the following (I underline what is significant to me):

*Whenever I read good quality action research, I gain particular insights and confront particular issues that immediately raise questions about my own classroom practice. I am encouraged to see my own practice with new eyes and offered the possibility of developing new ways of working in my own particular context.*

Insight is to do with the capacity to understand hidden truths about others or about situations. In Green's case, she says that having insights helps her to "*confront particular issues*". Is it possible to know what helps Green or others to gain insights? I don't suppose it is possible to know. However, I can conjecture, can form an opinion, as to what might help others gain insight. When discussing above the contribution of creativity to my spirituality, I had said that in acting creatively I was able to communicate not so much a quantity of factual information but "*intuition, reverence, awe, seeing, and*

*acceptance of tentativeness and ambiguity in connection with myself and others.*" I believe that much of my research enquiries, and the forms in which I communicated it, had the potentiality to lead to what Green (ibid) calls confronting "*particular issues*." One of the "*particular issues*" I wished the teachers I was supporting to tackle was the issue of understanding and accepting themselves so that their students, in turn, might get to know and accept themselves (Jersild, 1955: 3).

Let me look at the issues of self-understanding and self-accepting as I consider Jane's response to an imaginary dialogue of mine about intimacy that she had read. The issue of creativity has within it, I believe, the potential to enable teachers to move towards their own and their students' self-understanding and self-acceptance. Likewise for me, too!

Having read one of my dialogues at the action research meeting on 12th May, Jack Whitehead asked the group this question:

*Could I ask - this is important regarding the validity of an account - how the language is being used? You could also say something about your authentic response, you know, how are you feeling, if it is meditative, anything, so that Ben gets an appropriate feeling himself about how this writing is being received. What does it do to you as you read it?*

This question seems to me to indicate that one of the influences my research can have is how it evokes a fellow feeling within people who hear or read what I have written. This, in turn, seems to me to imply that if people thus respond, I can be sure that what I have presented is authentic. And authenticity is one of the social standards of judgment by which I want my thesis to be at least partly judged. But, before making further observations or judgments let me to consider what replies I received and how I should judge them.

Jane replied, saying, that she found the imaginary dialogue she had read was

*absolutely overwhelming. I find this quite, quite beautiful .... why this is so wonderful (is) because .... you have questioned yourself*

*here .... how often do we have discussions like this with other human beings in our lives, I think it's quite rare, isn't it?*

Verbalising, as I am doing now on paper, does not capture what I heard in Jane's voice as well as hearing what she said. I heard in her voice that she was obviously greatly moved affectively by what she had read, and because her emotions were involved, she related to my 'dialogue'. She even seemed to be saying that this particular idea should be tried more often; that if it were, it would be 'good' for people. It would be 'good' in the sense of others coming to self-understanding and self-acceptance.

I would conjecture also that my creativity had helped Jane to call up what I said above about *"intuition, reverence, awe, seeing, and acceptance of tentativeness and ambiguity in connection with .... others."* If that happened for Jane, it seems to me to be similar to what Green (1999: ) was saying above in relation to action research, that: *"It is the understandings of the complexities of the particular situation and the recognition of the different ways in which the familiar can be interpreted that is the aspect that is so readily transferable to other situations."* What I mean is that Jane herself might be moved to use her own creativity in her own way to bring about changes with her students in her classroom so that she might bring about improvement.

But back to the 12th May meeting. Jack asked of my question:

*And now what about the second part (of Ben's question) - that you can accept and open yourself to others?*

Robyn explained the second part thus:

*it began to explain to me a little bit about why I had the nerve to have some of the conversations with you (Ben) .... talking to you about what my prejudices about religion were. Why did I choose you to be telling these things to - because you somehow allowed me to do this. What I received back was that it was OK and so I could go on doing it. I just found myself open to you (laughs).*

Robyn had applied to herself the second part of my question, she had



accepted and opened herself to to me. Robyn obviously trusted me, had confidence in me; felt she could tell me anything she liked and it would be okay. My response is that my action research is obviously authentic, trustworthy. It is trustworthy not just because the 'evidence' is trustworthy, but because I am trustworthy.

But let me note also that my research is trustworthy because I have had prolonged engagement with it over a period of six years (1993 to 1999); I have shared the various chapters in my thesis with the Bath action research group over that period and have had extensive critiquing from the group (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 219). When, for example, I didn't notice the moments of 'living contradiction' in my thesis, I was shown where they were. It seems to me that being able to establish such trustworthiness and credibility helps the possible relatability of my research in my thesis.

While I don't want to offer an exhausting and exhaustive treatment of the use-value of my research in my thesis, I want to refer briefly also to my action research enquiries in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Regarding Marion's tutoring help to her colleague, Valerie, in chapter 2, I have already shown how rigorous I was in the application of the action research cycle to Marion's and my concerns. There is clear evidence here, I believe, as to the use-value of my action research.

What helps me to remain credible and prepares me to improve my practice is realising that I am a living contradiction, that is, I hold values but deny them in my practice. I improve by reversing my denial. So when I received Zoe Parker's criticism about the "*hierarchical layers*" apparent in chapter 2, I went on the defensive and didn't realise for some years that my defensive position had all but silenced her voice. I had become a 'living contradiction'. I was horrified when I finally came to realise that I had been using oppressive power relations towards Zoe of the kind that I believe sometimes sustains hierarchy (chapter 5) and "*hierarchical layers*" too. I only became free from oppression when I wrote about liberating Zoe's voice and simultaneously learned from her insight about

*“power relations.”*

I learnt another lesson connected with my value of freedom from Valerie (chapter 2), *“the right to be different.”* And I learnt from her student, Rose, that freedom involves a choice among alternatives.

In chapter 3, my new-found independence, new-found freedom from fear, based on my new-found relationship with God, that was enabling me to author my life. It formed part of the interweaving of my relationship with John. It was the source of my effort to influence him to become free of his own fears. Interwoven with this new-found radical call to personal freedom was a love, a care, towards others which I explained thus in section one, chapter 2:

*My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible.*

John said of me: *“you are caring towards others and towards me!”* What I am able to say of John is that: *“I am glad that I have had John’s help in learning about my educational development.”* As I am accepting, affirming and confirming John, he was doing likewise for me, in creating my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

And John’s own self-understanding has grown, too, as he showed me (22nd July, 1999) when he said: *“Do you remember telling me a few years ago, in viewing some videos of my lessons with my students, that you were worried that my students were incurious?”* I did remember. John now said, however, that: *“You were right, they were incurious, but I couldn’t bring myself to admit it at the time. It is now something I’m looking forward to rectifying when I return to the classroom in September. I now want to whet my students’ appetite of curiosity.”* So I had some influence after all on John’s classroom curricular interests. It helped me to know that I can trust my intuitions and judgments.

In terms of my relationship with David (chapter 4), my use of the

linear, rational, logical form of the action research cycle didn't seem to be helping him to loosen himself from his fears and anxieties concerning discipline, wasn't helping him to become more creative. As I did with my interior monologue in this chapter, so in the future I want to use my imagination and enable teacher researchers to use theirs in ways that complement the use of the action research cycle. When Pat D'Arcy first read this interior monologue, she cryptically wrote to me: "More! More!" Although it may sound trite and somewhat amusing to attribute too much to her exclamation, nevertheless, I believe I can draw a conclusion from it. I believe Pat may have picked up my experience of having my values denied as a child and that this may have been what now strongly motivated me in my desire to support others through my own embodiment of my values. And, of course, she would have picked up the strength of my emotions pervading the writing, which supported the values about which I was talking. It seems to me that Pat obviously related not only to how I was saying what I was saying, but also to what I was saying. In that sense it would have had use-value for Pat. Whatever she would do with it subsequently wasn't something I had thought of enquiring about.

I learnt much from my experience of 'conflict' in chapter 5. One experience was that I could be free. I believe I became free in so far as I was able to handle my then circumstances. Being free didn't necessarily mean I was autonomous (Marcel in Roberts, 1957: 304). Becoming free didn't, for example, entail me in 'action' in the sense of being able to change the 'power relations' I experienced at the college. No, but I did seek and I did win interior freedom. I believe that learning how to achieve freedom from oppression, as I did, has use-value for others.

From Joanna's (the university lecturer I quoted in chapter 3) remarks (20th March, 1999) about my thesis as a whole, it is clear to me that it had use-value for her, particularly perhaps, in the sense of self-understanding and self-acceptance. Below is some of what she said:

*As a reader of your text I have just had an exhilarating and simultaneously draining experience. It has taken me two days of*

*struggling with new ways of thinking for me ....*

Joanna went on to indicate its use-value to her:

*Wonderful, exhilarating, distressing, demanding and deeply moving. What a powerful writer you are! The honesty and integrity of the writing and the rigour of the search makes terms like validity and reliability pale into insignificance. The temerity, fear, self-doubt of a human being are laid bare and, as a reader, I'm able to step in with you ....*

Perhaps, too, what she felt was significant for me may also have been significant for her, that is, my search for democracy and freedom:

*I sense .... the intimacy and communion .... In your search for democracy in your life and freedom, I know I have the right to maintain mine.*

Apparently, then, my search for freedom did not remove Joanna's own freedom. That is an important finding for me. Apparently, I used power to impel me forward in my search but not as a means of misuse or abuse of others.

A question I haven't posed until now is this: who is the audience for my thesis? The evidence from my thesis is that it is teachers who, having examined and critiqued my thesis, responded and related to it as I have been pointing out above. On my part, my response has been, as Polanyi (1958: 267) puts it,

*to believe that the function of .... reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt, so as to retain a firm hold on this programme of self-identification.*

My attitude of self-confidence in what I have to offer others in terms of my research is particularly important in an age where, according to Rowland (1993: 121), the centralised political concern for accountability have coincided *"with an increased distrust of the judgments which individual .... teachers .... make in the course of their*

*practice.*" Though my thesis hasn't dealt extensively with how teachers have improved their practice so that the quality of their students learning has increased, it has dealt with it to some extent, for example, in chapter 2. It has dealt, however, with other important issues. Following Jersild (1955: 3), I believe that:

*The teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help the students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance.*

I have made no apology about taking as my key research interest the idea of connecting the personal with the professional in my explanations of my educative relationships and encounters with teachers. In my relationship encounters with them I believe that it is not the educational intentions that I bring to the encounters that are paramount so much as the encounters themselves that are educational (Buber, 1965: 107). The encounters are educational because I work at accepting, affirming, confirming the other (Buber, 1988: 75). In being accepted, affirmed and confirmed, the other is more confidently able to answer questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" and, "*How do I live out my values in my practice?*" (Whitehead, 1993). As the teacher is improving what he or she is doing, I am working at helping them to understand and accept themselves so that they can, in turn, help their students to know themselves so that they may have a healthy acceptance of themselves (Jersild, 1955: 3). I emphasised that concern in particular regarding my educative relationship with John in chapter 3.

'Etty', a researcher about whom I talked in Taylor *et al* (in press), having read an earlier version of my chapter 5, told me (2nd February, 1997) how my work had influenced her:

*What struck me was how closely some of your thoughts had mirrored my own at various times in the past. However, you seem to make the point so well.*

Etty described the circumstances and situation in which she felt my work would help:

*That brings me on to some very recent events at work. There are a very small number of women managers .... and they have come together to consider their own personal and professional development. I am now coming to realise that they have not received the respect and assistance that they deserve, and also that I am one of the people who have failed to give them this! .... It could be said that their difficulties are doubled because they are both women in a male-dominated organisation and they are support staff as opposed to full-time staff.*

But she went further, she told me how my work could help her practically:

*When I read your paper today I saw that they too may find some comfort in it and indeed some strength. I was therefore wondering whether you would mind me letting them have a copy.*

She added:

*When I read your paper I really did feel as if my own various frustrations were somehow acceptable and therefore were helped to be put into place.*

Etty's identification with what I wrote and how I wrote it, points to its use-value, but also shows, I believe, that much of my research may have a universal value in the extent to which its themes belong to, and are applicable to people. They are issues and concerns with which many people are grappling and to which they are looking for 'solutions'.

As I detailed many of my issues and concerns in chapter 6, I show that, like Merton, I have been searching for my own humanity; I have engaged in the process of finding my own 'true' identity and in preserving my individuality in order to be a person of integrity. My prose poem at the end of chapter 5 pointed in the same direction. In practice, I am committed to finding my identity and preserving my integrity through my exercise of freedom and love towards others in my educative relationships.

In my efforts to become contemplative I realise that what I have been doing is to see things as they really are; a perspective that caused me

to want to treat each person I met as being unique. I wished to take responsibility for my own life, for finding myself, and to enable others to <sup>to</sup>so, also.

In order to pursue my personal goals, my values, I became an enquirer. Like Merton, I asked questions. I came to realise that some uncertainty was necessary in order for me to continue as an enquirer who has an open mind (see Derrida in chapter 5). And, over the years, following Merton, I came to deny tradition its hold over me, realising that it wasn't healthy for me to accept tradition blindly. I also learnt from Merton that "*causing disturbance in others' mind*" was no bad thing. It led me to holding "*a dialectic of care and challenge*" in my relationships with others.

Following McNiff (1999: 49), then, I came to realise that the only person I could change for the better was myself. All I could do with others was to try to make my influence count for good with them. The latter is what I tried to do as I indicated above when considering the use-value of my thesis. My brief review of my learnings from chapters 2 through 6, brings up the issue of own educational development - changing myself for the better - as I created my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. So who have I become as a result of my action research enquiry as I explained it in my thesis?

In terms of trying to make my influence count for 'good' with others, as McNiff suggests (ibid), I am now willing to admit that I am a 'good' person. Let me explain what I mean. Pat D'Arcy (chapter 6) said, referring to my quality of listening, that:

*It's not exactly a new revelation to say that being a good listener is a very good important quality.*

But Jack responded to Pat by saying:

*Now, if you ask what does it mean to be a 'good', a 'good' listener?, there's a complete shift of emphasis and meaning .... That seems to me to be very related to why Robyn would feel that immediate rapport in the sense of Ben being not just a good*

*listener in those terms of listening well, but a good person who is listening well.*

I accept that I have changed in terms of realising that I am a 'good' person who also listens well. I realise that researching and writing my thesis has enabled me to have confidence in the 'universalism' of my themes; that many teachers, and others, have come to realise they could relate to what I was explaining; that some - Etty, for example - could use some of my research practically in order to improve what she was doing.

Let me touch, but lightly only, on the issue of improvisation and on my creation of my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

Kundera (quoted in Rowland, 1993: 34), has this to say about what feels to me like some aspects of 'improvisation':

*There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself? That is why life is always a sketch. No, 'sketch' is not quite the word, because a sketch is an outline of something, the groundwork for a picture, whereas the sketch that is our life is a sketch for nothing, an outline with no picture. (from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*)*

To improvise means to create, to compose, and to do so extemporaneously, that is, without preparation. In a sense that is what I've done. In my relationships with teachers and others I decided I wanted to connect the personal with the professional in my encounters with them. I also articulated the view that it was not the educational intentions that I brought to the encounter that were paramount so much as that the encounters themselves that were educational. And that the encounters were educational because I came to accept, affirm and confirm the other (Buber, 1988: 75). In so doing, they would more confidently be able to answer questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" and, "*How do I live out my values in my practice?*" (Whitehead, 1993).



While obviously what I've just stated above is an intention, albeit a general one, in much of the actual encounters themselves I wanted to understand the other. Though I was concerned with my effectiveness, I wanted most to be able to be "*responsive rather than purposive*" (Bateson, 1989: 234). By being responsive I mean that I wanted to be able to look and listen, and to touch emotionally, rather than to pursue abstractions, with my values of freedom and love as the base out of which I worked. And for that kind of research programme I needed to work at being 'good' as Jack described it (meeting at the University of Bath on 12th May, 1997). And so, as well as helping others to improve what they were doing, I had to do likewise. I worked at freeing myself interiorly, at caring for myself, at becoming 'good' for my own sake, but particularly for the sake of others. I believe my action research enquiry in my thesis showed that, to some extent at least, I succeeded.

## 2. Looking towards the future, the way forward

Marshall (1995: 328) explains that "*for the moment, many women have to live with their potential marginality in organizations.*" Because as a man I have experienced such marginality within the religious congregation to which I belong, I welcome Marshall's idea that I accept "*marginality*" as having potential for forward movement. Following Marshall (p. 328), in chapter 6 I decided to award myself inclusion in my organisation. I decided, as I said (ibid), to "*move from alienation from my religious congregation to reaffiliation.*" That didn't, of course, mean that I would never again challenge myself, as Marshall (ibid) explains it, about why my inclusion "*feels in doubt.*"

In terms of the work I decided to do after my doctorate, I chose not to work with my religious congregation because my "*inclusion*" was, in my mind, "*in doubt.*" What I wanted to do - work in an action research mode with teachers and others - wasn't part of my religious organisation's plans, despite my repeated efforts to explain and recommend it to the officials of my organisation. I now accept that my effort at reaffiliation with my religious congregation can't be

naïve or static, can't encompass an unwarranted sense of loyalty to my religious congregation. My understanding, arising from my action research enquiry, is that I need to live with what Marshall calls *"aware and chosen marginality, being both a member and suitably detached"* (ibid).

At the same time I accept that I should calculate *"how to achieve sufficient inclusion to exercise influence"* (Marshall, 1995: 328). In order to do so within my religious congregation, I will continue to live as a member of my religious congregation, but will work apart from it, as I outline below.

Because of the structures of management that my religious congregation recently set up, I will be accountable for myself to the congregation and so be in a position to explain to officials of my religious congregation the work I am doing elsewhere. I hope to try to publish at least some or all of my present action research enquiry (Taylor *et al*, in press, already contains part of it). I am hoping that these different means of being accountable, of making my action research public, will enable me to *"achieve sufficient inclusion to exercise influence"* within my religious organisation. I want to do so in order to open the minds of its leaders to the value of a living form of educational theory for improving practice.

And so to the work that I will take up full-time after my doctorate. Like my thesis, it happened in an improvisatory way. In early April, 1999, I received a letter from a member of my religious congregation, Leo. He has been working in Dublin's inner city for some years with young people in educational programmes in school and in out-of-school programmes. In his letter he asked me if I would partner him, act as his critical friend, as he took up an action research approach to a doctorate in spirituality which he wished to do.

In replying to Leo's letter (20th April, 1999), I told him that

*I decided to read your book for the second time .... I read it again because I felt it would help me to understand a bit more about you and your work, and about the nature of your request. It*

*would help me to see how I might formulate my reply to you in a way that would be useful to you, and would help to draw you into how I view action research.*

I told Leo that: *"your integrity and your capacity to take others and their culture seriously leapt up at me from every page!"* I also told him that:

*There were the moments when I was greatly moved by your humanity and your openness to being vulnerable. At these moments I found myself pausing in order to empathise as deeply as I could with your emotions. For example, you said that you had 'been privileged to share in friendships here which have shaped and flavoured my life', and that: 'I was brought close to tears once by the generosity of a particular teenager offering to help people on probation.' Clearly, you prize generosity, and the goodness which I sense you ally with it, as great values and gifts. My question to you is this: 'how can you contribute even more fully your own generosity and goodness of heart to 'the thirst for inter-relatedness, bonding, community, belonging, connectedness, identity and mutual respect'? that you speak about ....*

I noticed, too, that Leo wished *"to respect each individual, be quiet, gentle and understanding in the face of rejection and abusive language."* And he spoke about the need *"to begin some reflection on what is happening in the group."* He went on to say that:

*Being accepted by someone who is kind, reflective and non controlling is healing for some and disarming for many.*

My question for him was: *"How can you continue to develop more fully in yourself and others kindness, reflectiveness and a non controlling attitude in ways that are healing and disarming?,"* words that I borrowed from his text but turned into a question for him to answer.

Leo mentioned that teenagers who are used to rejection may find it difficult *"to hear praise or accept validation at a deep level."* And that: *"You can do it but you can only do it if you have people to believe in you, and you know it."* I told Leo that his teenagers:

*needed somebody like you to believe in them, and so my question to you is this: 'How can you bring more 'patience,' 'silence' and 'hearing' into your relationship with others so that .... you may help to heal the 'new scars (that) come out of hiding' - scars to do with 'wounded sexuality, confused desires, the vulnerable seeking*

*love, the powerful seeking to use?*

I then went on to outline the 'living educational theory' form of action research (Whitehead, 1993) and incorporated within it what Leo had said in his book about a 'Dialogue Approach.' I told him that his 'Dialogue Approach' was:

*very close to what action research is about: no hierarchy, 'a spirit of tolerant searching', 'a renunciation of absolute truth', '.... authenticity is tested and defined in dialogue', 'In the mutual search, the truth is discovered', 'The way of liberating humanity is in free dialogic relationship', and so on.*

I finished my letter by asking Leo how he could turn his research concern

*to do with you conducting an action research investigation - from a spiritual / theological perspective - into the multiple transitions that are impacting on youth .... into a question that you could research, stating it in terms of: 'How can I .... ?'*

When we met at the end of May, 1999, Leo told me:

*I am genuinely astonished, overwhelmed really, at how well you know me. We are comparative strangers, yet in reading your letter I felt you were talking to me face-to-face, understanding me perfectly. I felt very moved at your empathy towards me and what I was attempting to do with deprived teenagers in this inner city area. Thanks for the great effort you put into writing to me. I don't ever remember receiving a letter like yours, thanks again.*

Leo and I agreed that I should approach the college (which I am calling Pearse College) at which he intended registering for his doctorate regarding their view of my partnering him. Leo and I also agreed that I might be able to play a useful role working in some way on behalf of those who have been deprived of education in their earlier years. Pearse College has a Centre for Educational Opportunity Programme, whose initiatives are aimed at students who have dropped out of the school system. These initiatives are part of the college's "commitment to life-long learning and to providing access for all groups." It has a 'Parents in Education Programme' which helps to foster a working partnership between parents and schools so that

both may co-operate to provide support, encouragement and motivation for young people in their educational development. To this end Pearse College has designed a 'community-based programme' which consists of two elements. There is, firstly, a programme for parents which is about helping them to encourage their children to remain on in second-level education and to continue to third-level education. There is, secondly, a programme held in conjunction with schools, in which management and staff representatives work with parents to establish "*effective parent-school partnerships*."

At the invitation of the College President, Professor Eda Summerville, I visited Pearse College on 4th June, 1999, and got a wonderful reception. I met both Professor Summerville and Anne Keen, the Director of the Centre for Educational Opportunity. In my subsequent letter to Anne Keen (5th June, 1999), among other things, I said:

*I am writing to thank you for the wonderful experience of yesterday. I really enjoyed our conversation. I left the College feeling full of enthusiasm for the work you are doing. It seemed to me to bear out what I had already felt were the strong ethical concerns articulated in the College brochure, something I mentioned to you at our meeting.*

I continued:

*I feel strongly enthused also by your interest in action research as a way both of researching and improving / understanding practice. I am really looking forward to collaborating with you as we both try to help Leo to identify his concern for his Ph.D. And I look forward, at the appropriate time, to being involved formally in that work, and in the work of the Centre for Educational Opportunity.*

Pearse College weren't *au fait* with action research until Leo brought it to their attention. They are now committed to introducing it into their work with second chance students, parents and teachers. They see me having a role in helping them to familiarise themselves with it and use it in their work. I see myself using action research in my work with the College personnel and with those they work with.

In writing to Leo, also on 5th June, among other things, I said: "*If all*

*of this comes true, it will help me to become re-engaged with the option for the disadvantaged."* This idea is a reference to the 'disadvantaged' which is strongly highlighted in my religious congregation booklet, *New Beginnings* (1996), which declares:

*We will situate all our new ventures at the margins having reviewed our present ministries in the light of our call to new beginnings.*

In situating its ventures 'at the margins,' my religious congregation says it wants *"to see the world through the eyes of the poor"* and *"to accept .... our involvement with the most disadvantaged in society ...."* I am pleased to be able to help my religious congregation to implement its aim through my future work with Leo and with Pearse College.

I am greatly attracted to working with Leo and with Pearse College. It is one way in which I will be able *"to see the world through the eyes of the poor."* It will enable me, too, to put into practice among 'disadvantaged' people, Macmurray's (in Fielding, 1998: 18) view that: *"The first priority .... is learning to live in personal relations to other people."* It will consolidate in my mind Macmurray's (1961: 211) certainty that:

*We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the other is the central and crucial fact of personal existence ....*

Furthermore, my contact with Leo and with two of the personnel of Pearse College impressed on me the meaning of the friendship that Ferder (1988: 171) talks about when she describes friendship as coming *"from the heart, not (from) sharing information."* I was further privileged at my meeting with the College personnel in being able to share in their conviction and excitement about what they were doing for others. My experience of what they are doing and how they are doing it with others is so different from the experience I had at the college of education where I worked, particularly between 1993 and 1995 (chapter 5). My recent experience with personnel at Pearse College, as brief as it was, was one of equality, I was treated as an equal. It reminded me so clearly of Macmurray's (1950: 74) view of equality when he said:

*Equality is a condition of freedom in human relations. For if we do not treat one another as equals, we exclude freedom from relationship .... Any attempt to achieve freedom without equality, or to achieve equality without freedom, must, therefore be self-defeating.*

I am feeling enthusiastic about the future and about "*education as transformative community*" (Fielding, 1998: 9) in which I can help others and myself in our journey "*of human being and becoming .... infused with hope,*" (ibid) feeling glad that, like Vanier (1993: 28), I will again be able to walk "*in that passage towards liberation, growing on the journey towards wholeness ....*"

I am excited, therefore, by what I have discovered about the meaning of community. Yes, for me, being in community does mean "*learning to live in personal relation to others*" (Fielding, 1998: 18). Yes, for me, being in community does mean communion. Yes, for me, being in community does mean fellowship. Yes, for me, being in community does mean sharing my thoughts with others. Yes, for me, being in community does mean coming to a common shared vision over time. But I want to understand community, to understand communion, in another way too.

In the Church to which I belong 'communion' is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ which people receive when present at the ritual called the eucharist. This form of communion means the indwelling of the body of Christ in another under the form of a wafer - and His spirit too. However, dictionaries narrow the meaning of indwelling to being present in spirit, to spiritually inhabiting the other. I neither wish to indwell corporally or spiritually in another, however, nor that they similarly indwell in me. That kind of communion, of indwelling, would mean, for me, accepting an intimacy of similarity, of unity, of fusion, but not of otherness. It would symbolise for me privileging the known for the unknown, understanding for mystery.

I never mentioned Christ in my thesis until now. For me, Christ is a symbol of my relationship to the known, whereas using the term

God, as I did in my thesis, is a symbol, for me, of my relationship to the unknown. In stripping away the doctrinal formulations and liturgical practices with which the church and my religious congregation surrounded my God (chapter 3), I was seeking the God of relationship that was unknown and, therefore, of mystery. Because I do not know nor understand this God I have to continually search for understanding in my relationship with Him. But in searching for an understanding of Him, I am also searching for an understanding of others. I believe I can best facilitate my search to understand others in relationship by considering them as other, difference, mystery, unknown.

I now profoundly believe that in my relationship with others I need to constantly be surprised by their otherness, their mystery, their difference from me. In being surprised, I believe I am better able to enhance their dignity and their freedom, and my awe and respect for them.

The more I sought to understand others, knowing they were of mystery, as I did in my studies of singularities, the more I believed that I was becoming an 'I'. In becoming more an 'I' in my understanding of my own educational development, I am now in a position, I believe, to transcend my values of freedom and care in favour of a notion of community that always takes seriously the notions of others as difference, as mystery, as unknown, while always working towards understanding them.



## **Bibliography**

Allport, G.W. (1961) *Pattern and Growth of Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. In L. J. Bischof (1970) *Interpreting Personality Theories* (2nd edition). New York, Evanston and London: Harper International Edition, Harper & Row.

Appignanesi, R. and Garratt, C. (1995) *Postmodernism for Beginners*. Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd.

Arendt, H. (1961) *Men in Dark Times*. New York: The Viking Press.

Au, W. and Cannon, N. (1995) *Urgings of the Heart*. New York and New Jersey: Paulist Press.

Austin, J.L. (1961) *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ayer, A.J. (1956) *The Problem of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books. In J. McNiff, (1993) *Teaching as learning: an action research approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bacik, J.J. (1992) *Contemporary Theologians*. Cork: The Mercier Press.

Barthes, R. (1988) *The semiotic challenge*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bassey, M. (1995) *Creating Education Through Action Research: A Global Perspective of Educational Research for the 21st Century*. Newark and Edinburgh: Kirklington Moor Press in conjunction with the British Educational Research Association.

Bateson, M.C. (1989) *Composing A Life*. New York, London, Brisbane: A Plume Book, Penguin.

Bennis, W. (1993) *An Invented Life: Reflections on Leadership and*

*Change*. London: Century.

Bennis, W. and Nanus, B. (1985) *Leaders: The Strategies of Taking Charge*. New York: Harper & Row.

BERA, Code of Practice For Publications (1999, April) *Research Intelligence*, No. 68, p. 17.

Berlin, I. (1950) '*Freedom and its Betrayal*', unpublished ms., Berlin Archive, Wolfson College.

Berlin, I. (1969) *Four Essays on Liberty*. London: Oxford University Press.

Berlin, I. (1998a) *Personal Impressions* (Ed. by Henry Hardy with an Introduction by Noel Annan). London: Pimlico.

Bernstein, R.J. (1993) *The new Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity / Postmodernity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Best, R. (Ed) (1996) *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*. London: Cassell.

Biesta, G. (1998 August) *Where Are You? Where Am I? Education, Identity and the Question of Location*. Paper presented to Symposium: Philosophy and Educational Research at BERA, Belfast.

Bischof, L.J. (1970) *Interpreting Personality Theories* (2nd edition). New York, Evanston and London: Harper International Edition, Harper & Row.

Blackmore, J. (1994) Educational leadership: a feminist critique and reconstruction. In J. Smith (Ed.) *Critical perspectives on Educational Leadership*. London: Falmer Press.

Bly, R. (1990) *Iron John: A Book about Men*. Dorset: Element.

Bochen, C. M. (1998) (Ed.) *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume Six 1966-1967*. In P. M. Pearson, D. Sullivan, and I. Thompson (1998) (Eds.) *Thomas Merton, Poet, Monk, Prophet*. Papers presented at The Second General Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland at Oakham School, March.

Bonhoeffer, D. (1976) *Life Together*. New York: Harper and Row. In Vanier, J. (1993) *Community and Growth*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Brecht, B. (1974) *Brecht on Theatre*. London: Methuen. In Evans, M. (1998) Using Story to promote Continuing Professional Development for Teachers. *Journal of In-service Education*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 47-55.

Buber, M. (1957) *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*. New Jersey, London: Humanities Press International, Inc.

Buber, M. (1965) *Between Man and Man*. New York: Collier Books, MacMillan Publishing Co.

Buber, M. (1975) *I and Thou* (Trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith). Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Buber, M. (1988) *The Knowledge of Man* (transl. M. Friedman & R.G. Smith). Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Human Press International, Inc.

Burton, N. (Ed) (1988) *Thomas Merton, A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. London and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

Cole, A.L. (1997) *Impediments to Reflective Practice: toward a new*

agenda for research on teaching, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice. The Journal of the International Study Association on Teacher Thinking*, Vol 3, No 1.

Collingwood, R. G. (1924), *Speculum Mentis, or The Map of Knowledge*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. In K. Eames (1993) *A Teacher-Researcher's View*. In T. Ghaye & P. Wakefield (Eds) *C.A.R.N. Critical Conversations: A Trilogy. Book One, The Role of Self in Action Research*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

Collins, P. (1992) *Intimacy and the hungers of the heart*. Dublin: The Columba Press.

Collins, U. and McNiff, J. (Eds) (1999) *Rethinking Pastoral Care*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cooney, W. (1989) (Ed.) Introduction. In *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy: A Collection of Essays*. Lewiston, Queenstown, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Cooper, D.E. (1990) *Existentialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Corey, S. (1953) *Action research to improve school practices*. New York: Columbia University.

Covey, S.R. (1990/1995) *Principle-Centered Leadership*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Cunningham, B. (1995, August) *Valuing the spiritual*. Paper presented at the CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network) Conference, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham (Appendix 4 in thesis).

Cunningham, B. (1997, September) 'Can I communicate to you the meaning of my spiritual qualities in how I live and know in my work in education?' BERA Conference, York University.

Cunningham, B. (1999) 'How do I express, communicate and have

legitimated as valid knowledge the spiritual qualities in my educational journey?' in Taylor, P., Gilmer, P. and Tobin, K. (Eds) *Transforming Undergraduate Science Teaching* (chapter 13). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publications.

Dadds, M. (1990) Teacher appraisal for teacher development. Cambridge Institute Newsletter, January. In M. Dadds (1993b) The feeling of thinking in professional self-study. *Educational Action Research*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 287-304.

Dadds, M. (1991) *Validity in award-bearing teacher action research*. Norwich, Centre for Applied Research in Education: University of East Anglia.

Dadds, M. (1993a) Thinking and Being in Teacher Action Research. In J. Elliott (Ed) *Reconstructing Teacher Education: Teacher Development*. London and Washington: The Falmer Press.

Dadds, M. (1993b) The feeling of thinking in professional self-study. *Educational Action Research*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 287-304.

Dadds, M. (1995a) The Feeling of Thinking in Professional Self-Study. In C.A.R.N. *Critical Conversations: A Trilogy. Book Three, Creating Cultures for Improvement: Dialogues, Decisions and Dilemmas*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

Dadds, M. (1995b) *Passionate Enquiry and School Development: A Story About Teacher Action Research*. London, Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press.

D'Arcy, P. (1998) *The Whole Story...* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. School of Education, University of Bath.

Donald, J. (1992) *Sentimental education: Schooling, popular culture and the regulation of liberty*. London & New York: Verso.

Dowrick, P.W. and Biggs, S.J. (1983) Using video: psychological and

social applications. Bath: John Wiley. In M. Dadds (1995a) *The Feeling of Thinking in Professional Self-Study*. In C.A.R.N. *Critical Conversations: A Trilogy. Book Three, Creating Cultures for Improvement: Dialogues, Decisions and Dilemmas*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

Eames, K. (1993) A Teacher-Researcher's View. In T. Ghaye & P. Wakefield (Eds) *C.A.R.N. Critical Conversations: A Trilogy. Book One, The Role of Self in Action Research*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

Eisner, E. W. (1993) Forms of understanding and the future of educational research. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 22, No. 7, pp. 5-11.

Eisner, E. W. (1994) *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered* (2nd edition). New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Eisner, E. W. (1997) The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 4-10.

Eisner, E. W., Peshkin, A. (Eds.) (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*. New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Elbow, P. (1986) Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Teaching and Learning. Oxford: Oxford University Press. In Jane W. O'Dea, *Pursuing The Truth in Narrative Research*. Papers of the Philosophy of Education Society, April 8-10, 1994.

Eliot, T.S. (1948) *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. London.

Elliott, J. (1978a) What is action research in schools? *Journal of Curriculum Studies* Vol.10, No. 4, pp. 355-357.

Elliott, J. (1981) *Action-research: a framework for self-evaluation in schools*. Cambridge: Schools' Council TIQL Project Working Paper No.

1.

Elliott, J. (1991a) *Action Research for Educational Change*.  
Buckingham: Open University Press.

Elliott, J. (Ed) (1993) *Reconstructing Teacher Education: Teacher Development*. London and Washington: The Falmer Press.

Elliott, J. (1998) *The Curriculum Experiment: Meeting The Challenge Of Social Change*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Elliott, J. and Adelman, C. (1973) Reflecting where the action is: the design of the Ford Teaching Project. *Education for Teaching*, Vol 9, No 2, pp. 8-20.

Elliott, J. and Adelman, C. (1976) *Innovation at the classroom level: the Ford Teaching Project*. Course CE023 Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Ellsworth, E. (1997) *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address*. New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D. and McCormack, A. (1991) *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles Within Circles*. London and New York: Falmer Press.

Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., Anzu, M. (1997) *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words*. London, Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press.

Evans, M. (1995) *An Action Research Enquiry into Reflection in Action as part of my role as a Deputy Headteacher*. Ph.D. thesis, Kingston University, Kingston, Surrey.

Evans, M. (1997) Shifting the leadership Focus from Control to Empowerment - a case study. *School Leadership & Management*, Vol.

17, No. 2, pp. 273-283.

Evans, M. (1998) Using Story to promote Continuing Professional Development for Teachers. *Journal of In-service Education*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 47-55.

Ferder, F. (1988) *Words Made Flesh*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press.

Feyerabend, P. (1975) *Against Method*. London: Verso. In Whitehead, J. (1993), *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Collected Papers. Bournemouth: Hyde Publications.

Fielding, M. (1998) *Community, Philosophy & Educational Policy: Why Effective Policies Won't Work*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of BERA (the British Educational Research Association), The Queen's University, Belfast, 27-30 August.

Freire, A. M. A. and Macedo, D. (1998) *The Paul Freire Reader*. New York: Continuum.

Friedman, M. S. (1976) *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Friedman, M.S. (1983) *The confirmation of otherness in family, community, and society*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Fromm, E. (1957), *The Art of Loving*. London: Thorsons, an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers.

Fromm, E. (1991) *The Fear of Freedom*. London and New York: Routledge.

Fromm, E. (1994) *The Art of Listening*. London: Constable.

Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*. London:



Penguin Books.

Furlong, M., (1995) *Merton: A Biography*. London: SPCK.

Gadamer, H-G. (1975) *Truth and Method* (Second, Revised Edition; Transl. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall). London: Sheed & Ward.

Gadamer, H-G. (1987) 'Text and Interpretation'. In *Critical Encounters*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Gallagher, M.P. (1995) *What are they saying about unbelief?* New York: Paulist Press.

Ghaye, T. & Wakefield, P. (Eds) (1993) *C.A.R.N. Critical Conversations: A Trilogy. Book One, The Role of Self in Action Research*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

Ghaye, A. and Ghaye, K. (1998) *Teaching and Learning Through Critical Reflective Practice*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Gibson, R. (1986) *Critical Theory and Education*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury.

Gordon, C. (Ed.) (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977/Michel Foucault*. London: Harvester.

Gore, J. (1993) *The Struggle for Pedagogies*. London & New York: Routledge.

Gray, J. (1995) *Berlin*. Paperback, Fontana Press.

Green, K. (1999, January) *Personal correspondence*.

Green, K. (1999) Defining the Field of Literature in Action Research: a personal approach. *Educational Action Researcher*, Vol 7, No 1, pp. 105-124.

Greene, M. (1988) *The Dialectic of Freedom*. New York and London: Teachers College Press and Teachers College, Columbia University.

Habermas, J. (1976) *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Routledge: London. In Whitehead, J. (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Collected Papers. Hyde Publications: Bournemouth.

Hall, V. (1996) Women in educational management: a review of research in Britain. In J. Ouston (Ed.) *Women in Educational Management*. Harlow: Longman.

Hanson, K. (1986) *The self imagined: Philosophical Reflections on the social character of psyche*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hickey, D.J. (1993) *Developing A Written Voice*. London and Toronto: Mayfield Publishing Company Mountain View, California.

Hillman, J. (1994) *Insearch: Psychology and Religion*. (Second revised Edition). Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications.

Hirst, P. and Peters, R.S. (1970) *The Logic of Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D. (1989) *Research and the Teacher*. London & New York: Routledge.

Holbrook, D. (1980) What It Means To Be Human. Unpublished manuscript. Cambridge: King's College. In J. Whitehead (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Collected Papers. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

- Hollingsworth, S. (1994) *Teacher Research and Urban Literacy Education: lessons and conversations in a feminist key*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hopkins, D. (1985) *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research* (2nd ed., 1993). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ignatieff, M. (1998) *A Life of Isaiah Berlin*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Ilyenkov, E. (1982) *The Dialectic of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. In J. Whitehead (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Collected Papers. Dorset: Hyde Publications.
- Iser, W. (1974) *The reading process: a phenomenological approach*. In R. Cohen (Ed) *New Directions in Literary History*. London: Kegan Paul. In Evans, M. (1998) *Using Story to promote Continuing Professional Development for Teachers*. *Journal of In-service Education*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 47-55.
- Jackson, P.W. (1990) *Commentary on the Papers by Grumet and by Wolcott. Looking for Trouble: On the Place of the ordinary in Educational Studies*. In E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*. New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Jersild, A.T. (1955) *When teachers Face Themselves*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kearney, R. (1984) *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kearney, R. (1986) *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Kearney, R. (1991) *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard*. London: Harper Collins Academic.

- Keirse, D. & Bates, M. (1984) *Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types*. Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company.
- Kelly, W.A. (1956) *Educational Psychology*. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company.
- Kemmis, S. (1983) Action research. In T. Husen and T. Postlethwaite (Eds) *International Encyclopedia of Education: Research and Studies*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (Eds) (1988) *The Action Research Planner*. 3rd Edn. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Kennelly, B. (1991) *The Book of Judas: A Poem*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.
- King, P. (1995) *Dark Night Spirituality: Contemplation and the New Paradigm, Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Etty Hillesum*. London: SPCK.
- Kohli, W. (1980) Education and freedom in the American experience: Critical imagination as pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59: 98-107.
- Kramer, V.A. (1996) *Thomas Merton, Turning Toward The World: The Pivotal Years, Journal, Volume Four*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Laidlaw, M. (1994) The Democratizing Potential of Dialogical Focus in an Action Enquiry, *Educational Action Research*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 223-241.
- Laidlaw, M. (1997 May) *Personal correspondence*.
- Lambert, L. (1998) *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Lather, P. (1994) *Fertile Obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism*. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and Method: Political Activism and Educational Research*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lealman, B. (1996) *The Whole Vision of the Child* (chapter 2: 20-29). In R. Best (Ed) (1996) *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*. London: Cassell.

Lewin, K. (1946) Action research and minority problems. *Journal of social issues*, Vol. 2.

Levinas, E. (1984) *Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas*. In Kearney, R. (1984) *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Lomax, P. (1994) *The Narrative of an Educational Journey or Crossing the Track*. London: Kingston University, School of Education, Kingston Hill, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7LB.

Lomax, P. (1995) Action Research for Professional Practice (1). *British Journal of In-service Education*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 49-57.

Lomax, P. (1998, July) *Coming to a better understanding of educative relations through learning from individuals' representations of their action research*. In Symposium on Representing Educative Relations: a range of contexts; The proceedings of the Kingston Hill Action Research Group. London: Kingston University, Kingston Hill, Kingston Upon Thames.

Lomax, P. (1999, April) Working Together for Educational Community Through Research. *Research Intelligence*, No. 68, pp. 11-16. BERA.

Lomax P and Parker Z (1995) Accounting for Ourselves; the problematic of representing Action Research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 25, No.3, pp. 301-314.

Lomax, P. and Whitehead, J. (1998) The Process of Improving Learning through Developing Research-based Professionalism and a Dialectic of Collaboration in Teaching and Teacher Education, 1977-1997. *Journal of In-Service Education*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 445-464.

Lowrie, D.A. (1956) *Christian Existentialism*. New York.

Macdonald, A.M. (1979) (Ed) *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*. Edinburgh: W & R. Chambers Ltd.

MacDonald, B. and Walker, R. (1976) *Changing the Curriculum*. London: Open Books.

Macmurray, J. (1941a) "Persons and Functions". Outline Document for a series of radio talks submitted to the BBC, 19 September, Unpublished. In Fielding, M.(1998) *Community, Philosophy & Educational Policy: Why Effective Policies Won't Work*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of BERA (the British Educational Research Association), The Queen's University, Belfast, 27-30 August, 1998.

Macmurray, J. (1941d) "Two Lives in One" Persons and Functions - III Listener Vol. 36 No 675 December: 822. In Fielding, M. (1998) *Community, Philosophy & Educational Policy: Why Effective Policies Won't Work*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of BERA (the British Educational Research Association), The Queen's University, Belfast, 27-30 August, 1998.

Macmurray, J. (1941e) "The Community of Mankind" Persons in Functions - IV Listener Vol 36 No 676, 24 December: 856. In Fielding, M. (1998) *Community, Philosophy & Educational Policy: Why Effective Policies Won't Work*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of BERA (the British Educational Research Association), The Queen's

University, Belfast, 27-30 August, 1998.

Macmurray, J. (1950) *Conditions of Freedom*. London: Faber & Faber.

Macmurray, J. (1991) *The Self as Agent*. London: Faber & Faber.

Macmurray, J. (1992) *Reason and Emotion*. London: Faber and Faber.

Macmurray, J. (1993) *Persons in Relation*. New Jersey & London: Humanities Press International, Inc.

Macquarrie, J. (1972) *Existentialism: An introduction, guide and assessment*. London: Penguin Books.

Macquarrie, J. (1983) *In Search of Humanity*. New York: Crossroad.

McClure, M. (1996) Telling Transitions: boundary work in narratives of becoming an action researcher. *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 273-286.

McGrath, A.E. (1996) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

McKernan, J. (1991) *Curriculum Action Research*. London: Kogan Page.

McNiff, J. (1988) *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. London: Macmillan Education.

McNiff, J., (1993) *Teaching as learning: an action research approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

McNiff, Whitehead, and Laidlaw (1992) *Creating a Good Social Order Through Action Research*. Dorset: Hyde Publications.

McNiff, J., Lomax, P. and Whitehead, J. (1996) *You and Your Action Research Project*. London and New York: Routledge and Hyde

## Publications.

'Marion', (1993, November) *Acting as a supporter for action research in my school: A Dialogue with the self*. (Data archive).

'Marion', (1994, May) *Acting as a Supporter for Action Research in My School*. Paper presented at a College School-Based Action Research Project Workshop for action researchers. (Data archive).

Marshall, J. (1981) Making sense as a personal process. In P. Reason and J. Rowan (Eds) (1981) *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Chapter Thirty-Four, pp. 395-400).

Marshall, J. (1984) *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World*. John Wiley & Sons.

Marshall, J. (1995) *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career Life Choices*. London and New York: Routledge.

Merton, T. (1948) *The Seven Storey Mountain*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Merton, T. (1949) *Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions.

Merton, T., (1953) *The Sign of Jonas*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Merton, T., (1955) *No Man is an Island*. San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest/HJB Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

Merton, T. (1956) *Thoughts in Solitude*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.

Merton, T. (1961) *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: A New Directions Book.



Merton, T. (1964) *Raids on the Unspeakable*. New York: New Direction348ns.

Merton, T. (1966) *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. London: Sheldon Press.

Merton, T. (1973) *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company/Image Books.

Merton, T. (1975) *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (Eds. Burton, N., Bro. Hart, P. & Laughlin, J. Consulting Editor, Amiya Chakraverty). New York: A New Directions Book

Moffett, J. (1994b) The universal schoolhouse: Spiritual awakening through education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. In I. Papoulis, Spirituality and Composition: One Teacher's Thoughts. *Jaepl (Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning)*, Vol. 2, Winter 1996-1997, pp. 10-16.

Morea, P. (1997) *In Search of Personality: Christianity and Modern Psychology*. London: SCM Press.

Morgan, G. (1983) *Beyond Method*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications. In Marshall, J. (1995) *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career Life Choices*. London and New York: Routledge.

Munby, H. and Russell, T. (1994) 'The authority of experience in learning to teach: Messages from a physical methods class'. *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 45, pp. 86-95.

Murdoch, I. (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. In S. Ruddick [1980] 'Maternal Thinking'. *Feminist Studies* Vol. 6, pp. 342-67.

Murdoch, I. (1997) (Ed. P. Conradi) *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. London: Chatto & Windus.

*New Beginnings* (1996) by a Religious Congregation. Johannesburg  
(For private circulation).

Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noffke, S.E. (1991) Hearing the teacher's voice: Now what?  
*Curriculum Perspectives*, 11 (4), 55-59.

Noffke, S.E. (1997) Professional, Personal, and Political Dimensions of Action Research. In M.W. Apple (ed.) *Review of Research in Education*. Washington: American Educational Research Association.

Nouwen, H. (1974) *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press.

Nouwen, H. (1979) *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation*. New York: Doubleday.

Nouwen, H. (1982) *A Letter of Consolation*. New York: Harper & Row.

Nouwen, H. (1994a) *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Nouwen, H., McNeill, D.P. and Morrison, D.A. (1982) *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. New York: Doubleday.

O'Dea, J. (1994) Pursuing the Truth in Narrative. *Papers of the Philosophy of Education Society*, April 8-19.

O'Donoghue, D. (1998) *The Practice of Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

O Murchu, D. (1995) *Reframing Religious Life*. Slough, United Kingdom and Kildare, Ireland: St. Paul's.

Ontario College of Teachers (1999 March), Standards of Practice for

Teachers. *Professionally Speaking*.

Padovano, A. T. (1984) *The Human Journey, Thomas Merton: Symbol of a Century*. Garden City, New York: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Palmer, P. J., (1998) *The Courage to Teach: Exploring The Inner Landscape Of A Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Parker, Z. (1995 January). *Personal correspondence*.

Parker, Z. (1997, May). *Personal correspondence*.

Peck, S. (1983) *People of the Lie*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Peters, T.J. and Waterman Jr., R.H. (1982 / 1986) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Phillips, A. (1993) *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*. London: Faber and Faber.

Phillips, A. (1995) *Terrors and Experts*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Polanyi, M. (1974) *Personal Knowledge*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Popper, K. (1959) *Logic of Scientific Enquiry*. London: Hutchinson.

Popper, K. (1972) *Objective Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Powell, J. (1989) *Happiness Is an Inside Job*. Valencia, California: Tabor.

Priestley, J. G. (1996) *Spirituality in the Curriculum*. Hockerill Educational Foundation: Hockerill Lecture (unpublished Ms).

Pring, R. (1988) Personal and social education in the primary school. In P. Lang (Ed) *Thinking about .... PSE in the Primary School*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (Eds) (1981) *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore: John Wiley & Sons.

Reidy, M. (1990) *Freedom to be Friends: Morals and Sexual Affection*. London: Collins Religious Publishing.

Roberts, D. E. (1957) *Existentialism and Religious Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rodger, A. (1996) Human spirituality: towards an educational rationale (chapter 4: 45-63). In Best, R. (Ed) (1996) *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*. London: Cassell.

Rowland, S. (1993) *The Enquiring Tutor: Exploring the Process of Professional Learning*. London, Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press.

Ruddick, S. (1980) 'Maternal Thinking'. *Feminist Studies* Vol. 6, pp. 342-67.

Ruddock, J. (1996 March) *Students' voices: what can they tell us as 'partners in change'?* Address to the fifth BEMAS Research Conference: Partners in Change: Shaping the Future. Robinson College, Cambridge.

Russell, B. (1916) *The Principles of Social Reconstruction*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Russell, T. (1994a) 'Reconstructing educational theory from the authority of personal experience: How can I best help people learning

to teach?, in M. Laidlaw, P. Lomax and J. Whitehead (Eds) *Proceedings of World Congress 3 on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management. England.* University of Bath, pp. 195-198.

Russell, T. (1994b) *Foreword to The Experience Book .... The Roots of our Ever-Branching Tree.* Kingston, Ontario: Waterloo-Queen's Co-operative Science Education Program, Queen's University Faculty of Education.

Russell, T. and Korthagen, F. (1995) (Ed.) *Teachers Who Teach Teachers: Reflections on Teacher Education.* London and Washington: Falmer Press.

Ryle, G. (1949) *The Concept of Mind.* London.

Sartre, J-P. (1975) *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans, Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. In Phillips, A. (1995), *Terrors and Experts.* London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Sayer, J. (1987) *Why have you come to school today? A pathology of presence.* In K. Reid. (Ed.), *Combating School Absenteeism.* London: Hodder and Stoughton. In J. Elliott (1998) *The Curriculum Experiment: Meeting The Challenge Of Social Change.* Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

SCAA. (1996) *Education for adult life: the spiritual and moral development of young people* (a summary report prepared by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority).

Scott, D. and Usher, R. (1996) (eds) *Understanding Educational Research.* London & New York: Routledge.

Seidman, S. (1991) *The end of sociological theory: The postmodern hope.* *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 9, pp. 131-146.

Seitz, R. (1993) *Song for Nobody: A Memory Vision of Thomas Merton.*

Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books.

Shabatay, V. (1991) *The Stranger's Story: Who Calls and Who Answers?* In C. Witherell and N. Noddings (Eds) (1991) *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York and London.

Shannon, W.H. (1993) *The Silent Lamp*. London: SCM Press Ltd.

Sinclair, A. (1998) *Doing Leadership Differently*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Skolimowski, H., (1994) *The Participatory Mind: A new theory of knowledge and of the universe*. New York: Arkana, Penguin Books.

Solle, D., (1990) *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International. In M. P. Gallagher (1995), *What Are They Saying About Unbelief?* New York: Paulist Press.

Spender, D. (1984) 'Defining reality: a powerful tool'. In C. Kramarae, M. Schutz and W.M. O'Barr (eds) *Language and Power*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. London: Sage.

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann.

Stenhouse, L. (1979) "using research means doing research'. In H. Dahl, A. Lysne and P. Rand (Eds.) *Spotlight on Educational Research*. Oslo: University Press.

Stenhouse, L. (1983) *Authority, Education and Emancipation*. London: Heinemann.

Stevens, R. (1996) 'Introduction: Making sense of the person in a social world'. In R. Stevens (ed.) (1996) *Understanding the Self*.

Milton Keynes: Open University. In Ghaye, A. and Ghaye, K. (1998) *Teaching and Learning Through Critical Reflective Practice*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Still, L. (1993) *Where to from Here? The Managerial Woman in Transition*. Sydney, NSW: Business and Professional Publishing. In J. Marshall (1995) *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career Life Choices*. London and New York: Routledge.

Taylor, P., Gilmer, P. and Tobin, K. (Eds) (1999) *Transforming Undergraduate Science Teaching* (chapter 13). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publications.

The Times, 16th April, 1998, 'Gradgrind knew a fact or two ...' by Chris Woodhead (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools).

Thompson, D. (1995) (Ed.) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York.

Tschumi, B. (1994b) *Architecture and disjunction*. Cambridge, London: MIT Press.

'Valerie', (1994, May) *Can I Use my practice with my pupils to show the relevance of Religious Education for them?* Paper presented at a College School-Based Action Research Project Workshop for action researchers. (Data archive).

Van Kaam, A. (1969) *Fulfilment in the Religious Life*. Deville, New Jersey: Dimension Books.

van Manen, J. (1988) *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. London and Ontario: State University of New York.

- Van Manen, M. (1995) 'On the Epistemology of Reflective Practice'. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* Vol. 1 No.1, pp. 33-50.
- Vanier, J. (1993) *Community and Growth*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Vardy, P., (1996) *Kierkegaard*. London: Fount, An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers.
- Weil, S., (1951), *Waiting for God*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Whitehead, A.N., (1961) *The Aims of Education*. New York: New American Library/Mentor Books.
- Whitehead, E.A. and Whitehead, J. D (1982) *Christian Life Patterns: The Psychological Challenges and Religious Invitations of Adult Life*. New York: An Image Book, Doubleday.
- Whitehead, J. (1985) An Analysis of an Individual's Educational development: The basis for Personally Oriented Action Research (p. 53). In Whitehead, J. (1993), *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Hyde Publications, Bournemouth.
- Whitehead, J. (1989) Creating a Living Educational Theory From Questions of the Kind, 'How do I Improve My Practice?' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 99-110.
- Whitehead, J. (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Collected Papers. Dorset: Hyde Publications.
- Whitehead, J. (1995) Educative relationships in a Life History Approach to Self-study (chapter 7). In Russell, T. and Korthagen, F. (1995) (Ed.), *Teachers Who Teach Teachers: Reflections on Teacher Education*. London and Washington: Falmer Press.



Whitehead, J. (1999) *Creating a new discipline of educational enquiry in the context of the politics and economics of educational knowledge.*

Paper presented at the BERA symposium at AERA, Montreal, Canada, April.

Wilson, J. and Wilson, N. (1998) The Subject-matter of Educational Research. *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 355-362.

Winter, R. (1988) Fictional critical writing. In J. Nias & S. Groundwater-Smith (Eds) *The Enquiring Teacher*. London: Falmer Press.

Winter, R. (1989) *Learning From Experience: Principles and Practice in Action Research*. London: The Falmer Press.

Winter, R. (1997, October) *Managers, Spectators, and Citizens: Where does 'Theory' come from in action research?* Keynote Address to the 1997 CARN Conference, Watford, London.

Winter, R. (1998) *Research, Universities, and 'Theory'*. A paper presented at BERA, Belfast, August.

Witherell, C. and Noddings, N. (1991) (Eds) *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953/1958) *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## **Appendix**

### **Action Research: 'How do I improve what I am doing?'**

In what is not intended to be an exhaustive account, I summarise below some of what I've learnt about the historical roots of action research. In the account I also offer my understanding of my form of action research as it evolved in answer to my enquiry question, "*How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?*"

#### **Stephen Corey**

Stephen Corey (1953) first spoke of action research as being a means for improving practice in school. He urged teachers to research their own practice in order to improve it. Prior to that the only researchers were the 'expert' outsiders who 'objectively' researched social situations. But Corey wanted teachers to research their own practices scientifically so that they could evaluate their decisions and actions, modify and reformulate their plans. And so the cycle would proceed. Corey insisted on teachers' research being a cooperative activity which would support democratic values.

#### **Kurt Lewin**

Kurt Lewin (1946) is reputed to have been the first to use the term 'action research', as a way of describing professional development in social situations. It was only later applied to what teacher-researchers were actually doing. Lewin's conception of action research is different, however, to how many teacher researchers would see it today. Hopkins explains (1985: 54) the difference thus:

*.... Lewin's conception of action research is very different from what goes on in the name of teacher research. Lewin's concept of*

*action research was (i) as an externally initiated intervention designed to assist a client system, (ii) functionalist in orientation, and (iii) prescriptive in practice. None of these features apply to what I assume to be the nature of classroom research by teachers which is characterized by its practitioner, problem solving, and eclectic orientation.*

Hopkins (ibid) also points to the fact that the functionalist values appearing in Lewin's writing contrast with his commitment to democracy and communitarian values.

Lewin's form of action research was externally initiated and so differed from our current conception of the personally initiated form of action research by teachers. However, the cycle of reconnaissance, planning, action and observation favoured by Lewin forms the essential basis of current action research.

### Lawrence Stenhouse

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975: 144) was the first researcher in Britain to advocate and work towards enabling teachers to take an active role in teacher research. Rather than implementing outsider researcher's ideas in their teaching, he wanted teachers to research their own practice. As he said, *"It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied, they need to study it themselves."* Furthermore, he advocated,

*The commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development;  
The commitment and the skills to study one's own teaching;  
The concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills.*

Stenhouse (1983:163) also wanted the student, the teacher and the school to experience emancipation:

*My theme is an old-fashioned one - emancipation .... The essence of emancipation as I conceive it is intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgment.*

The intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy involved in emancipation could enable teachers and others to be self-determining, to be self-authoring. They could take at least some responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Stenhouse (1983: 163) wanted the student to be able to stand outside the teacher's authority and to be able to discover and own knowledge for him/herself. He wanted teachers, by adopting a research stance, to escape from the control situation they so often found themselves in. He wanted teachers to critically assess their situation. By so doing they would be engaged in meaningful professional development and become more autonomous in their judgments on their own practice.

Stenhouse was interested in the school, as institution, also experiencing emancipation. The 'autonomous' and 'creative' school could adapt external changes for internal purposes. It need not be a slave to external pressures. Successful internal change would involve the teacher in successful internal learning.

In Stenhouse's conception of action research, however, external observers still monitored the practice of the teacher. Teachers didn't have the responsibility to explain their own practice unaided for themselves. Full-time researchers still supported teachers' work (1975: 162), and the supporters were still the 'experts'.

### John Elliott and Clem Adelman

John Elliott, another prominent action researcher, is also the preeminent curricularist (McKernan, 1991: 22-23). It was in and through the concept of curriculum that Elliott's (1978a) first complete analysis of action research took place, it is entitled, "*What is action research in schools?*" In this analysis Elliott insists "*that teaching is inescapably a theoretical activity.*" The task of the teacher is to interpret their everyday practice in the pursuit of reflective self-development. Elliott wanted the teacher to reunify theory and

practice. The curriculum development movement spearheaded by Stenhouse, and afterwards by Elliott, helped to revivify action research. Elliott (1991a: 69), in defining what he meant by action research, said it was an attempt to improve the quality of life in a social situation, thus,

*Action-research might be defined as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it." It aims to feed practical judgment in concrete situations, and the validity of the 'theories' or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully. In action-research 'theories' are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice.*

Central to Elliott's (1987: 157) analysis is the idea that the action researcher develops a personal interpretive understanding from working on practical problems, and that practical action and discourse constitutes the theoretical understanding to be obtained. For Elliott, educational action research is a moral endeavour because it seeks to realise values in practice. It seeks to have teacher-researchers, rather than the academic disciplines, declared to be the main contributors to educational research.

Working with Adelman, Elliott (1973) wanted teachers to be collaborators rather than observers in order

*To help teachers already attempting to implement Inquiry/Discovery methods, but aware of a gap between attempt and achievement, to narrow this gap in their situation; to help teachers by fostering an action-research orientation towards classroom practice.*

Elliott and Adelman (1976) supported a small group of teachers to research their practice in implementing and developing a pedagogy of enquiry learning. It was during this project that both Elliott and Adelman described the procedure of 'triangulation' as follows:

*Triangulation involves gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different points of view; namely, those of the teachers, his pupils, and a participant observer .... By comparing his own account with accounts from the other two standpoints a person at*

*one point of the triangle has an opportunity to test and perhaps revise it on the basis of more sufficient data.*

Elliott considered curriculum and teaching to be theoretical enterprises and research itself to be a self-reflective process in which teachers examined their own theoretical world of practice.

### The hermeneutic / Interpretive tradition

Let me recall again Elliott's strongly articulated view about his research interest, which is *"the idea that the action researcher develops a personal interpretive understanding"*. It is with the interpretive tradition, and with Elliott's notion of *"a personal interpretive understanding"* that I now want to deal.

For Hitchcock and Hughes, (1989: 29) a major characteristics of interpretive research is to do with taking seriously

*the question of language and meaning and giving priority to first unravelling actors' description of events and activities ....*

The dictionary (Chambers Dictionary, 1979: 686) explanation of interpretation echoes that characteristic when it says:

*To interpret means to explain the meaning of, to elucidate, to unfold, show the purpose of: to translate into intelligible terms.*

Linked with interpretation is hermeneutics, which is described by the dictionary as the *"science of interpretation"* (p. 609).

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989: 29), the researcher becomes involved and develops a *"relationship with the subjects of the research."* This relationship leads to choosing a more directly participant form of observation, where the researcher observes individuals in their ordinary, everyday, natural social settings and records their accounts of what it was the individuals were doing (p. 32).

Great care is taken to faithfully reconstruct the *“actor’s”* perspective and detailed description comes before explanation. The focus is placed upon the individual’s or actor’s accounts and experiences rather than on *“an objective view through the eyes of an outside observer”* (ibid). There isn’t a concern with generalisation but with *“locating the subjects of the research in their own cultural and interactional context emphasising the need to understand the situation”* (ibid).

Interpretive research assumes that all human action is meaningful and therefore has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices. In fact, interpretive researchers stress the principle of intentionality. They stress that human action is for the most part deliberate; that people do not just react to situations and stimuli but reflect on their situation and act on this reflection, in a reflective way (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 28).

According to Scott and Usher (1996: 18),

*we need to understand the meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour.*

They go on to say that: *“Human action is given meaning by interpretive schemes or frameworks”* (pp. 18-19),

and that

*both the subject (the researcher) and the object (other people) of research have the same characteristic of being interpreters or sense-seekers* (ibid).

Knowledge, in the interpretive framework, is relative to that framework, is not cumulative but perspective-bound and partial. Interpretation is in itself circular. The interpretation of part of something depends on interpreting the whole, but interpreting the whole depends on an interpretation of the parts (Elliott, 1993: 18). And an important characteristic of the circularity of interpretation is that it always takes place against a background of assumptions and presuppositions, beliefs and practices (Scott and Usher: 1996: 19).

This, Gadamer (1975: 173) calls 'tradition.' As with interpretation, so too with the researchers who make interpretations. They can't be separated from the historical and cultural context that defines the interpretive framework (Scott and Usher: 1996: 19). Their interpretations will always takes place against a background of assumptions and presuppositions, beliefs and practices, of which the subjects and objects of research are never fully aware and which can never be fully specified.

Because the researcher and researchee in interpretive understanding are both part of a background or 'tradition', this raises the question of whether the researcher as interpreter, as meaning producer, can be objective about the meanings produced by the researchee. Although continuing to recognise their situatedness, researchers 'bracket', that is, temporarily set aside, their own meanings, suspend their subjectivity, and assume the attitude of disinterested observers (pp. 21-22). Of course Gadamer argues (1975) that this isn't entirely satisfactory because it's impossible to escape our 'pre-understandings' even temporarily.

Instead, it is useful for researchers to hold on to their interpretive frameworks or pre-understandings and to allow interplay between this and the actions that they are trying to understand. It is in this way that knowledge is developed. So, in fact, researchers' pre-understandings, far from being biases, actually make them more open-minded because as they are interpreting and understanding, their pre-understandings are being put at risk, tested and modified through the interface between the pre-understandings and the actions that they are trying to understand. So rather than bracketing their 'pre-understandings', researchers should use them as the essential starting point for acquiring knowledge (Scott and Usher, 1996: 22).

But what do researchers do about their perspective arising from their situatedness when they are connecting with the situatedness of the researched? According to Gadamer (in Scott and Usher, 1996: 22), there is a fusion or enlargement of the understanding of both



researcher and researchee which functions as an alternative to objectivity. The fusion is the outcome of intersubjective agreement where different and conflicting interpretations are harmonised. This happens not because of 'right' methods, but because of what Scott and Usher (1996: 24) call 'right' arguments, that is, propositional arguments. These 'right' arguments are subjected to the scrutiny of critical dialogue. Gadamer (ibid) believes that by comparing and contrasting various interpretations, a consensus can be achieved despite differences - indeed because of differences. The consensus, which is to be arrived at is subject to the social validation claims set down by Habermas (1976), according to which the form of communication of the researcher must be 'undistorted' in that it is accepted as being meaningful, true, justified and sincere by the validation group to whom the research is being presented.

#### *How best may I critique the hermeneutic / interpretive tradition?*

I wish to make some observations from the perspective of the form of action research I have created in my thesis - my own living educational theory. For the sake of fairness and justice, however, I believe I should try and embody here - even if I fail - Marshall's (1981: 399) heartfelt declaration that: *"I appreciate other positions, and I feel that each has its own integrity and its own validity."* Dadds (1993a: 231), too, views *"theoretical contributions"* as valuable, and this obviously includes the interpretive tradition. But how can I hold this tradition as being valuable and at the same time try to critique it respectfully? Let me see can I do so, as I follow Dadds' lead *"to seek to raise .... additional and complementary"* ideas that *"need not be adversarial, combative or hostile"*, as Marshall puts it (1995: 331). In an attempt then to be both respectful and inclusive, let me say that, for me, the interpretive tradition, critical theory too, and other research theories are on a continuum in which living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993) is the latest and newest action research idea that specifically claims to be educational.

Action research and my discussion about it is educational when I

keep my “I” at the centre of both my action research enquiry and my discussion about it. Following McNiff (1988: 37), I believe that my “I” is my unassailable and inalienable integrity, and is a living, proactive entity. Indeed, I acknowledged clearly in my thesis the force of my individual consciousness in my interpersonal relationships with teachers and others. It was a force that helped me to embody my values, especially those of freedom and love, as I both formed and encouraged one-to-one interpersonal and professional relationships with teachers and others in my action enquiries, as I created my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. But let me show how I had to differ from the interpretive tradition, as I was creating my own living educational theory.

The ‘truth’ claims I presented in my thesis (see Abstract) and at intervals to my Bath University validation group weren’t only to do with a process of argumentation, weren’t only to do with showing *“that the propositional content of what is being said is true”* (Habermas, 1976). My educational claims were never only about *“rational agreement reached through critical discussion”* (Scott and Usher, 1996: 23). Rather, I communicated my claims to educational knowledge through *“a dialectical and dialogical form which is not amenable to systematic representation in a purely propositional form”* (Whitehead, 1993: 114). ‘Right’ argument, *“taking seriously the question of language and meaning”* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 29), conceptual explanation and elucidation are all tools of propositional discourse, which by themselves couldn’t and didn’t help me to explain my own living educational theory. I explained my living educational theory within the form of intra-and inter-dialectical dialogues. The ‘intra’, meaning within, helped me to explain my meanings to myself, and the ‘inter’ meaning with others, helped me to explain my meanings to others.

In creating my own living educational theory I don’t believe I treated educational knowledge as a controlled commodity (McNiff, 1988: 17-19). By that I mean that I never wished to control the teacher researchers I was supporting in a deterministic way by persuading them to fit themselves and their practices into pre-defined

frameworks. Neither did I ever wish to be a participant observer and observe the teacher researchers I was supporting at work in their classrooms. If I did, I believe I would have had difficulty in maintaining an egalitarian stance, which is part of what I take the 'participant' in 'participant observer' to mean. I wanted the teacher researchers I supported to feel free to use their own tacit knowledge, trust their own judgments and create their own living educational theories. I wanted them to be able to understand the world from their own point of view (Polanyi, 1958: 327). I was available, however, to help them in whatever way they felt was helpful. Below, for example, is how I considered my role early in my educative relationship with John (chapter 3):

*I would have to wait to see what role would emerge for me in our educative relationship. Waiting and being willing to wait is a part of what I am now calling loving affirmation, albeit silent.*

That didn't mean, of course, that I never offered ideas to teacher researchers about how to move forward. I did, but I also wished to accept their right to accept or refuse. The value of freedom which I wished to embody in my relationship with them would be inauthentic unless the teacher researchers had choices between alternatives! So, even if I wanted to - and I didn't - I believe there was no way in which my work with others could be classified as predictive. I worked at trying to keep open the various options a teacher researcher might take up. Neither did I want to limit the teacher researchers options by references to 'pre-understandings', 'situatedness', or 'tradition.' If I had done so, the teacher researchers I was supporting mightn't have had sufficient freedom - in my view - to ask questions of the kind, "*How can I account for my educational development?*"

I was hoping of course that, in the process of my educative relationship with teacher researchers, they would consider the power of their "I" in questions of the kind, "*How do I improve my practice?*" In such questions they would discover, I believed, that their "I" existed as a living contradiction in holding values but experiencing their denial. Discovering their "I" to be a living contradiction, I felt, would motivate them to want to improve what they were doing. I believed also that the descriptions and explanations the teacher

researchers created for their own learning, would constitute their own living educational theories (Whitehead, 1993).

While I noticed in much of the literature that other teacher researcher supporters wrote up research on behalf of, or about, the work of the teacher researchers they were supporting, I have never wished to do so. If I wrote on behalf of others I would worry about whether I was being democratic and whether I was helping them to become, in my terms, "*as free from fears as is humanly possible*"? (section one, chapter 2) so that they could create their own living educational theories, as I was attempting to do for myself. I have to seriously ask myself, however, if that isn't what I did - wrote up my research about others?

I don't believe I did so because I was not primarily interested in describing or observing the work of others "*in their ordinary, everyday, natural settings,*" and "*recording*" what they were doing (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 29). Neither was I primarily interested in needing to "*understand the situation*" (ibid) in which the teacher researchers found themselves. I wasn't primarily interested in giving meaning to "*interactive human behaviour*" (Scott and Usher, 1996: 18) by means of "*interpretive frameworks*" (ibid). Neither did I primarily need linguistic meanings to what teacher researchers were doing. No, it was none of these!

What I was primarily interested in was the encounter in my relationship with others. I considered the encounter, rather than educational intentions, to be educational in the sense that it offered me the opportunity to accept, affirm and confirm others so that they could feel free and become more confidently able to answer questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" and "*How do I live out my values in my practice?*" (Whitehead, 1993). But was that the reality as I wrote up my various chapters in my thesis? I have to consider that now.

I spoke at great length about my educative relationships with Marion, Valerie and Rose in chapter 2, later in this Appendix.

reference also later in this Appendix to my 'conflict' in chapter 5, and spoke about the notions of 'marginality' and 'inclusion' (chapter 6) in terms of the future job I intended taking up. I spoke at length later in this Appendix about the actual job I intended taking up and how well it fitted in with my values (chapter 7). I aim to speak below about my educative relationships with John in chapter 3 and David in chapter 4 and the values that I tried to embody in those relationships.

In my educative relationship with John (chapter 3), I found he was very independent and tended to tell me what he was doing in his classroom to improve his practice. But I wanted to know what educative influence, if any, I was having with him. If my influence wasn't curricular, what was it? Gradually, and in an improvisatory way, two videos John had given me at different times helped me to conclude that John's pupils were passive, and inert. I intuited that if I challenged the passivity of John's pupils in order to bring about curricular change, perhaps I would also be helping John to alleviate what I also knew was present: John's fears. My challenge to John was part of the dialectic of care I wanted to show towards him that tried also to be sensitive to difference. In the event my challenge proved to be cathartic. John began to accept, I believe, that he could now rid himself of some of his fears - even though he didn't accept my assessment of passivity on the part of his pupils.

However, there was another challenge - to myself - though I connected it with John also. The challenge was this: *"What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with John?"* It took me a very long time - some four years - before I understood and could explain this challenge.

In researching my relationship with my God I was surprised to find it was a displaced but angry one. I discovered that my anger was really against my church and my religious congregation who, in using propositional language to describe God, and a liturgy that replaced Him, had masked the 'real' God from me, the God of relationship

(chapter 6). My experience of 'conflict' (chapter 5) helped me to become properly 'suspicious' of any bureaucracy and hierarchy that would attempt to so prescribe and predict, order and organise the 'world' without reference to those on whose behalf they were allegedly doing it. While my present description and explanation of my relationship with God may appear to be rational and logical (chapter 3) it was not like that for me interiorly. During the period in which I was adjusting to my new self-constructed reality about God, I was interiorly full of fears: am I judging justly the bureaucracies and hierarchies I have experienced? Am I really free to believe in a God of my own understanding?

The freedom born of my struggle to find a God of my own understanding helped me, I believe, to author my own life by helping me to slough off at least some of my fears of being independent. It was this freedom from fear, based on my new-found relationship with God that I claimed to be able to bring to my relationship with John. It was the source of my claim to influence him.

My relationship with John wasn't smooth. It was enduring, but not smooth. It withstood John's complaints that I misunderstood him, that I projected my fears on to him, that I occasionally 'theorised' him into a 'weaker' position vis-a-vis myself, that maybe I was contradicting the values of care and freedom in his regard. In the end what most concerned me was the extent to which John understood and accepted himself. If he had been more open to my challenges I theorised that perhaps his self-understanding and self-acceptance would have grown more. But who can say that with certainty? Not me.

But at the end John was still able to say of me: *"you are caring towards others and towards me!"* I, too, was able to say: *"... I am glad that I had John's help in learning about my educational development."* These two sentences distil for me my idea that the educative encounter itself is educational; that it enables me to accept, affirm and confirm the other in what they are doing. I am accepted, affirmed and confirmed, as I try to interweave my values in my educative

relationship with John and others in the the creation of my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

Let me now move to how I connected the personal with the professional in my relationship encounter with David in chapter 4.

At my suggestion, David, a teacher researcher, succeeded in implementing to his satisfaction the values of democracy and freedom within his various classes. But my use of challenging questions, using the action research cycle, didn't enable him to become creative in overcoming his anxieties and fears concerning 'discipline'. However, my fortuitous sharing of my leadership 'problems' with him (chapter 5) caught his imagination. It brought him to a new realisation about the importance of reflection. I didn't then realise what I was learning: that David was apparently influenced by what was personal, emotional and imaginative.

Using my imagination, I had previously constructed a poetic interior monologue. I apposed it in this chapter with my educative relationship with David. In the monologue I had a searing experience imprinted on my consciousness of remembering neglect and hurt when I was young. I mused, thus, on its source: *"far distant memories of 'put-down' experiences"* - more recent ones too (chapter 5). I found myself listening *"with mounting fury,"* to Ray who was attacking Sue because *"I am not hearing you telling us what you've learned and how you've learned it. I feel my time is being wasted."*

I remembered various values I would have liked others to practise towards me - trust, respect, uniqueness, assurance, care. Remembering them enabled me to make a commitment to helping Sue. I desired to say something *"significant"* to Sue, something *"important"* that would connect with her and *"tell her that she is worthwhile."* In terms of questions to help Sue move forward, the best I could manage at the time was this: *"What question, Sue, would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?"* It didn't matter that Sue's answer didn't answer my question. She offered an answer that obviously answered her own interior question: *"I am*

*going to write a story."*

In the interior monologue I believe I had connected my imagination with love and care, enabling me to see Sue with love. A love that now helped me to want to exercise a more gentle dialectic of care and challenge than I believe I had exercised in David's regard.

Retrospectively, then, I would have wanted to accept David as he is, rather than as I wanted him to be. But I finally found myself at ease in declaring in Levinas's words (Kearney, 1984) of David, that he was different from me, that *"two can have a better time than one."*

I realised that my use of the the linear, rational, logical form of the action research cycle with teacher researchers wasn't always sufficient. Maybe it didn't always offer sufficient freedom to others to be creative in their response to creating their own living educational theory. Perhaps it inhibited me, too, in my educative relationship with David! My use of my imagination would complement and not necessarily replace the action research cycle. Perhaps I could help teacher researchers in the future to make more use of their imagination, and other gifts, in their action research enquiries.

My action research questions of the kind, *"How do I live more fully my values of freedom and love?"* is not predicated on interpretive research, nor on critical theory (see below). I recognise, however, that other educational researchers may wish to adopt an interpretive and/or critical stance as their way forward in action research. For me, I need more freedom than I believe either the interpretive tradition or critical theory could offer me. I needed the freedom to evolve my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. I had a compelling necessity to show in my thesis how I embodied the values of freedom and love in my personal and professional relationships with John, with David and others. I believe that it was only by creating my own living educational theory that I could do that.

### The 'Deakin' school of action research



The 'Deakin' school of action research (located at Deakin University, Australia) which includes Stephen Kemmis and others, have put forward a model of critical educational research (McTaggart *et al.*, 1982; Kemmis, 1983; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Their model rejects the positivist belief in the instrumental role of knowledge in problem-solving, arguing that critical enquiry enables teacher researchers to search for the meanings that educational action has for them and to organise action to bring about a resolution to their classroom concerns. It criticises both positivist and interpretive theories on the grounds of passivity, and that they are exclusive of human action.

Carr and Kemmis's (1986) definition of action research is useful, widely used, and is as follows:

*Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals, and sometimes in cooperation with 'outsiders'. In education, action research has been employed in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs, and systems planning and policy development.*

Carr and Kemmis (1986) view the action research process as a series of reflective spirals in which a general plan, action, observation of action, and reflection on action is developed and then moved to a new and revised plan with action, observation and further reflection. They draw this trading off between retrospective understanding and future action directly from Lewin's theory of action research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) are concerned with focusing the practitioners' classroom problems thus: What is happening now? In what sense is it problematic? What can I do about it?

The critical theory of the 'Deakin School' of educational research prioritises teachers' critiques of their own practice rather than

rational goal achievement. It stresses equipping teacher researchers with discursive, analytical and conceptual skills so that they may remain free of the control of positivism and interpretive theory. And this is to happen in communities of self-reflective group understanding. Thus the 'Deakin School' of action research is emancipatory after the 'Frankfurt School' of critical theory, built upon the theories of Marx, Freud and particularly Habermas. Emancipation for them and for Carr and Kemmis, too, means the enabling of teachers and others to take control and direction over their own lives, as they use a pre-defined theory, critical theory.

Gibson (1986: 5-6) explains critical theory thus:

*Critical theory acknowledges the sense of frustration and powerlessness that many feel as they see their personal destinies out of their control, and in the hands of (often unknown) others .... Critical theory attempts to reveal those factors which prevent groups and individuals taking control of, or even influencing, those decisions which crucially affect their lives .... In the exploration of the nature and limits of power, authority and freedom, critical theory claims to afford insight into how greater degrees of autonomy could be available.*

*This characteristic marks out critical theory's true distinctiveness: its claim to be emancipatory. Not only does it provide enlightenment (deeper awareness of your true interests); more than that (indeed, because of that), it can set you free. Unlike scientific theory, it claims to provide guidance as to what to do.*

The term 'critical' in critical theory refers to the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy. And the knowledge interest involved in critical theory is *emancipatory*. This emancipatory knowledge interest is about the unmasking of ideologies that maintain the status quo. Ideologies do so by restricting the access of groups to the means of gaining knowledge and the raising of consciousness or awareness about the conditions that oppress or restrict them (Scott and Usher, 1996: 22).

The emancipatory knowledge interest of critical theory is not about individual freedom as self-assertion, for example, nor is it about helping the individual to feel powerful and self-realised. Rather, critical theory's approach to emancipation is about understanding

the cause of powerlessness and acting individually and collectively to change the conditions that cause it.

Gibson (ibid) issues a warning about critical theory:

*There are clearly immense problems attaching to a theory which not only argues that it reveals the world more clearly, but also asserts that it can be used to change the world, to liberate from inequalities and unfair restrictions.*

Critical theory, Gibson feels, is not a panacea for all the world's ills. But he feels that knowing how it may be applied may provide a rationale, and method, for teachers who wish to take more control of their professional and personal lives. However, there is at least one other serious problem with critical theory and its self-proclaimed commitment to an emancipatory project as a universal value. Gore (1993: 61) deploys Foucault's notion of a 'regime of truth' to argue that critical theory has its own

*power-nexus which, in particular contexts and in particular historical moments, will operate in ways that are oppressive and repressive to people within and/or outside.*

*The claim of critical theory does not convince me!*

I am not convinced by the claim of critical theory that "it can reveal the world more clearly and that its critical analysis can be used to change that world" (ibid). Is that not an utopian-like claim? Isn't it purporting to persuade me to embrace its theory so that various 'wrongs' can be righted in my practice? I find it difficult to believe that the application of critical theory, even if including emancipatory ideas with which I agree, is a panacea for the ills of society, or indeed for 'ills' in my practice. If I adopted it I believe I would be admitting that I am incapable of using my own personal knowledge to deal with my own concerns. In adopting it, I would be saying that I want, as Eames (in Whitehead, 1999: 12) put it, to "decide beforehand." In adopting a pre-defined theory such as critical theory, I believe I would be unnecessarily limiting my own freedom of thought, reflection and

action. I would be adopting a prescriptive and, perhaps, a predictive approach to my concerns. I would perhaps be admitting that there is no reason to think that I could evolve my own theory from my own practice, as I believe I did in my thesis each time I tried to 'resolve' my concerns in my practice, including emancipatory ones, in order to bring about improvement. Polanyi (1958: 327), helpfully, offers me his ideas about intellectual freedom which is part of the value of freedom to which I have pledged myself, when he says that:

*I must understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgment responsibly with universal intent.*

I'm not sure to what extent I could claim to understand the world from my own point of view, could claim originality, could fully exercise my personal judgment, if I persuaded myself to suspend my own personal knowledge in favour of the pre-defined theories of others in order to understand and resolve my concerns in my life and work. I have observed that such pre-defined theories don't offer ostensive examples of how they are actually embodied in the lives and actions of those who created them.

Such theories of knowledge, as critical theory, are, for me, 'objective' or 'propositional'. By being 'objective, or 'propositional', I mean that they are more or less reified or fixed; they consist of explicitly formulated ideas and statements that are 'out there,' and are considered to be 'true'. They are independent of me as a 'knower' (McNiff, 1993: 22-23). I wish to listen respectfully to whatever objective or propositional theories of knowledge can tell me, but within a framework of a dialectical form of knowledge in which I am creating my own living educational theory.

In my thesis I have used a dialectical form of knowledge, a knowledge that is based on the kind of enquiry that incorporates "*the interplay of question and answer*" (Collingwood in Eames, 1993: 4). Such a process of question and answer is, for me, a living and developmental form of knowledge in which I take responsibility for my own concerns, ideas and actions. It has the power to transform my

practice, or at least my understanding of my practice.

In my thesis, then, I was less preoccupied with objective or propositional theories, such as critical theory, and more preoccupied with the processes of action research, which involved individuals, including myself, in asking in our individual practices how we were improving something, however small. I was interested, also, in how this improvement was 'relatable' to others. I wanted it to "*stimulate worthwhile thinking*" (Bassey, 1995:111) as, for example (in chapter 2), when I showed how Marion, Valerie, Rose (and other pupils), and I, myself, managed to alleviate "*frustration*", "*powerlessness*" and "*unfair restriction*" (Gibson, 1986: 5-6) in our individual and interrelated practices. I initially experienced "*frustration*." (ibid) for example, in my attempt to understand my educative relationship with Valerie, but by assiduously 'worrying' my data, I gradually came to an appreciation of it. There was Rose, also. She was one of Valerie's pupils who put her experience of "*powerlessness*" (ibid) thus:

*In R.E. class there is no accommodation of different views especially on moral issues.*

Valerie, at my instigation, encouraged Rose to write about her own concerns. And at the end Rose was able to say that:

*I think R.E. was a lot more relevant this year .... because we dealt with real problems.*

I felt that in her life as a pupil, Rose had, with Valerie's encouragement, overcome a particular instance of feeling frustrated and powerless. In order to enable her R.E. class to be more 'relevant' and to enable pupils to think for themselves, Valerie herself decided to consult her pupils on their 'concerns.' She, too, was anxious to overcome her own feelings of "*frustration*" and "*powerlessness*" (Gibson, 1986: 5-6). Gradually, as she said, her class moved away from being teacher centred to being pupil-centred.

Valerie then began, as she said, to

*enjoy how articulate and opinionated the class were .... I felt at*

*this point I had a relationship with the class.*

She was also adamant that

*if I believe that education is about offering a person the ability to find meaningful life for themselves, well then I had better rethink my approach.*

Section two in chapter 2 shows that Valerie did “*rethink* (her) *approach*” in a series of measures, checking with her pupils as she moved along. On the basis of Valerie's arguments, I concluded that she had succeeded in changing the climate for learning and the quality of the learning itself in her classroom. I felt that whatever “*unfair restrictions*” (Gibson, 1986: 5-6) once might have existed in her classroom were now gone.

It seemed to me that Valerie didn't need to use any pre-defined theories to help her to improve her practice. She didn't, therefore, need to “*decide beforehand*” (Eames in Whitehead, 1999: 12). Rather, she embodied her values in her practice in order to help her theorise and make her decisions based on those values. Rather than use propositional or objective theory say, critical theory, to help her to embody her values in her practice, she used the dialectical logic of question and answer. This helped her, I believe, to be more open towards her students and led to “*changed understanding*” (ibid) on her part and on the part of her students.

### *I offer an alternative way of thinking and acting*

Listening again to the emancipatory ideas of Carr and Kemmis, as derived from critical theory (1986), I want to offer an alternative way of thinking and acting. But, first, let me listen again to Carr and Kemmis (p.198) as they explain their emancipatory theory:

*Action research not only creates conditions under which practitioners can identify aspects of institutional life which frustrate rational change; it also offers a theoretical account of why these constraints on rational change should be overcome, by offering and enacting an emancipatory theory in the form of the*

*theory of how the constraints of ideology can be overcome.*

When I originally read the emancipatory vision of Carr and Kemmis I felt excited and wished to rush into identifying those "*aspects of institutional life which frustrate rational change.*" I came to know, however, from my own experience in my enquiry (chapter 5), that each instance of institutional life is different from another instance, each is populated with different people, all of whom are different from each other.

In my action research enquiry each of the people I worked with was an individual different from any other individual. And because of my awareness of the vast differences between the people I encountered in power positions (chapter 5), and otherwise too, I came to believe that using an undifferentiated pre-defined theory, say, critical theory, or pre-defined leadership theories, for example, in order to resolve the power relations conflicts I experienced, would not work for me.

I didn't want or need, prior to my own action research reflection and action, a theoretical critique, such as an "*exploration of the nature and limits of power, authority and freedom*" (Gibson, 1986: 5-6). Critical theory claims to offer such a critique in order to help me to gain "*insight into how greater degrees of autonomy could be available*" (ibid). I want and need to be personally responsible for valuing my own personal freedom and personal integrity. My conscience constantly pleads with me to do so, as I try to understand the world from my own point of view, use my own originality, exercise my own personal judgment (Polanyi, 1958: 327) and evolve my own theory from my own practice, as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. By so doing, I am offering my own alternative to the emancipatory ideas of critical theory.

As part of my effort to evolve my own theory from my practice, my thesis showed me working as an individual, identifying individual items of my practice which needed changing and improving. I did so by imagining ways forward, devising action plans, acting, evaluating and modifying my action plans (Whitehead, 1993). For example, in dealing with my leadership 'conflict' (chapter 5), I decided that I

would neither pre-define or allow others to pre-define how I should act as leader of the action research project located at the college of education where I then worked (1990-1995). I took up a stance of nonconformity towards the expectations of others. Over time in regard to my leadership, I found I could *"constantly enact it,"* constantly *"accomplish it"* (Sinclair, 1998). I did so by experimenting in an improvisatory way *"with self-revelation, with resistance, with trying to build new paths"* (Sinclair, 1998).

A part of my effort *"to build new paths"* (ibid) consisted, on the one hand, of dealing with the 'conflict' I experienced, but on the other, of working to connect the personal with the professional in my explanation of my educative relationships with teachers (chapters 2, 3 and 4). I exercised my *"ethic of responsibility"* towards these teachers as I worked at enabling them to improve what they were doing at the same time as I was experiencing my leadership 'conflict' (chapter 5).

Despite, or perhaps because of, this 'conflict' I showed how my leadership came into being in my words and actions as I exercised my ethic of responsibility towards others (Abstract). My experience of the denial of my value of freedom as action research project leader (chapter 5) helped me to answer a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self. The radical call to myself of personal freedom helped me to work towards exercising a care towards others, born of love, which I explained thus in section one, chapter 2:

*My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly possible.*

I believe I succeeded in affecting some change and improvement in my understanding of a negative aspect of institutional life as I experienced it (chapter 5). The change and improvement I experienced as an individual wasn't external. I didn't suddenly experience *"rational change"* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 198) in the sense that the attitude of the principal of the college towards me changed from one of disregard to one of acceptance and understanding. No, I found I



had to use my personal knowledge by working internally on myself. I felt I had to preserve my sense of my identity and my sense of self-worth. But, simultaneously, I was confident that I had established good quality educative relationships with the teachers I was supporting, as they were improving what they were doing. My efforts to accept, affirm and confirm them not only helped them more confidently to improve what they were doing, but I also received acceptance, affirmation and confirmation from them, in turn. The teachers and I, therefore, reciprocally exercised an *"ethic of responsibility"* towards each other, as I simultaneously showed how my leadership came into being in my words and actions (Abstract knowledge claim).

Still (1993), quoted by Marshall (1995: 320), suggests that the preoccupation of women managers with exploring issues of identity and self is an indulgence. Still's (1993) advice to women, according to Marshall (ibid), is to focus instead, *"on achievement, on gaining power in current organizational structures and on identifying common agendas for change."* In spite of Still's (ibid) exhortative prescriptions, however, I don't hear *how* women managers are to bring about the changes that Still suggests. Like Marshall's (p. 321) women manager researchers, however, I, too, have *"wanted to feel more authentic and less defined by other people."* I needed to explore issues to do with my identity and integrity, and to do with not allowing others to define me. And so I used my reflection and writing about my action research enquiry to help me create a strong sense of my *"self"* that I *"could validate internally, and which could then provide firm, alive, bases for knowing, and acting"* (ibid, p. 321).

Marshall (1995: 326) suggests that her women manager researchers should choose *"sufficient truths to live by, realizing that things will unravel, managing to avoid undue anxiety and adopting an ever-enquiring attitude to encounter change as it occurs"* (ibid). Following Marshall (ibid), I believe that throughout my action research enquiry, I have acquired *"sufficient truths to live by ...,"* as I both embodied and constructed my values of freedom and love, in my intrapersonal dialogue and in my educative relationship with others, as a form of

improvisatory self-realisation.

There is a need, according to Marshall (ibid), to hold “*multiple perspectives*,” rather than “*one dominant, ‘right’ form*” because the world around me offers “*discordant expectations*.” There is a need, she says, for people to be “*aware of the personal, social and power-political processes through which frames are created, maintained and resisted*.” As for myself, I acquired my “*multiple perspectives*” (ibid) within, and in terms of, each of my studies of singularity as I analysed my experience of the negation of my values in my practice. I don’t think I have sought to transfer automatically the “*multiple perspectives*” that I may have acquired in one situation with one person, to another person in another situation. I have been unable to do so because I freely committed myself in one of my claims to educational knowledge to “*show .... a dialectic of both care and challenge that is sensitive to difference ....*” (Abstract). I have to honour “*difference*” within and between people. I would be unable to do that if I held what Marshall (ibid) calls “*one dominant, ‘right’ form*.”

It is not so much the situations in themselves *per se* that are important to me, as the people who are to be found in those situations that are important. In each instance, and with each person I meet, I have to unravel the “*multiple perspectives*” I have gathered and discriminate between them in terms of who others are and in terms of who I am. I believe that such a view is implied, and then shown, in my commitment in encounters with others to accept, affirm and confirm them so that they may more easily improve what they are doing (Introduction). I don’t always succeed, of course, in showing “*a dialectic of care and challenge that is sensitive to difference ....*” (Abstract) because I am also “*a living contradiction*” (Whitehead, 1993): I hold values and I deny them in my practice (chapter 5).

### Criticism of the “*individual focus*” of action research enquiries

I now want to consider Noffke’s (1997: 329) reference to individually oriented action research and that the “*individual focus*” of action

research enquiries such as mine, doesn't sufficiently "*address the social basis of personal belief systems.*" She says that:

*As vital as such a process of self-awareness is to identifying the contradictions between one's espoused theories and one's practices, perhaps because of its focus on individual learning, it only begins to address the social basis of personal belief systems.*

Noffke (1991; 1997) believes that such a process of self-awareness, while it can help to bring about "*collective agency*" (McNiff, 1988), built on the ideas of a society "*as a collection of autonomous individuals,*" it is not capable of addressing social issues in terms of the interconnections between personal identity and power and privilege in society. Let me attempt to 'answer' Noffke's concerns, as I consider the direction of my own research.

Noffke's argument doesn't convince me that "*autonomous individuals*" such as I aspire to being, are incapable of bringing about social change. I believe I will not necessarily understand social situations very well unless I first learn to be an autonomous individual. I believe that it was only because I showed myself in my thesis to be growing autonomously in my embodiment of my values in my educative relationships with teachers, that I was able to be societally useful to them. I believe I succeeded in doing so not so much at the 'macro' level, but at the 'micro level' of helping them with their action research enquiries in their schools.

These teachers, in turn, are now able to bring about change and improvement incrementally at their own micro level in the classroom. Perhaps by engaging in dialectical debate, maintaining openness to answering questions and challenges set by themselves and others, they will be able to change and improve concerns at the macro level of the whole school as well. I believe, too, that their willingness to disturb and be disturbed, to question and challenge need not be adversarial, combative or hostile (Marshall, 1995: 331; chapters 2 to 6).

I am also aware, however, that Dadds (ibid) hypothesises that

*"Research which arose from the interests of the individual, rather than the group would .... be less likely to serve the needs of the school" in "practical developments"* (Dadds, 1995: 4) beyond the classroom. While respecting Dadds' hypothesis, I am committed to individually oriented action research. I am committed to it because of its potential for raising the morale and confidence of individuals, including myself, as we pursue improvements in our individual practices (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). I cannot believe that when self-confident individuals come together in order to work at serving *"the needs of the classroom"* beyond the classroom, they won't succeed in doing so, but I agree that it remains to be shown beyond hypothesis at least in my case. In the meantime, I am willing to learn from Dadds and others who, embodying their values in their improvement of practice, have brought about *"collegial involvement and ownership"* (ibid) of action research concerns, and succeeded in bringing about change and improvement at the macro level of the school.

Noffke (1997: 334) lauds *"recent research"* that is articulating *"the historical roots of both individual and collective belief systems that form a basis from which personal awareness emerges."* In my research I do not wish, as in social history, to interpret the past as a base from which to begin researching the present social world (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 28). My form of research is individually oriented dialectical action research, which has helped me to realise that the derivation of my belief system is not of ultimate importance to me. And while not denying the *"historical roots"* of my belief system, I strongly believe that as I grow and develop, helped by continuous reflective enquiry, so do my beliefs and values. What is important to me is to continuously embody my values in my life so that I can continue to improve what I am doing with others in the present and future.

If by *"historical roots,"* Noffke means a system external to myself from which I have accepted an unshakeable and unchangeable belief system, I reject that notion. I know that my beliefs and my values achieved clarity in my thesis and were capable of changing, not through an acceptance of pre-defined beliefs and theories for analytic

purposes, but through my embodiment of my values in my educative relationships with others. It was in my practice of my educative relationships with others that I found ostensive meanings that clarified how I held my values, and the notion of 'being a living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993) was fundamental to those ostensive meanings.

### *My theory is a form of improvisatory self-realisation*

Regarding critical theory (Carr and Kemmis's, 1986) and, indeed, other 'outsider' theories, let me say that they are perhaps too prescriptive and predictive for me: my research is neither prescriptive nor predictive in intent or practice. It does not offer a panacea for great social ills or evils. It is more like the research Seidman (1991: 136) proposes when he argues "*that we be satisfied with local, pragmatic rationales for our .... approaches.*" In accepting a 'local', a 'pragmatic' and personal rationale for my study of singularity, which is my thesis, I base it on Winter's idea (1997; 1998) that:

*theory in action research is a form of improvisatory self-realisation, where theoretical resources are not pre-defined in advance, but are drawn in by the process of the enquiry.*

I included the propositional form of discourse - Winter's 'theoretical resources' - within the dialectical knowledge I used in my thesis. The dialectical knowledge I used is a form of knowledge based on "*the interplay of question and answer*" (Collingwood [1924] in Eames 1993: 4). The use of this form of knowledge is a process that, for me, is living and developmental. It includes both intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues in a form of research that is "*systematic, critical and self-critical*" (Bassey, 1995: 7). It is a form of research that doesn't "*predict probabilities, but .... (can) be related to other situations.*" This form of improvisatory research enabled me to create my own descriptions and explanations for my own self-realisation, my own educational development. My descriptions and explanations offered me an opportunity to evaluate my past practice with an intention to create an improvement which was then not in existence

(Whitehead in Lomax, 1999: 14), as I attempted in my research to answer questions of the kind, "*How do I improve what I am doing?*" and "*How do I live out my values in my practice?*"

Regarding pre-defined rules, theories or ideologies, I want to use a North-American slang expression "*dumbing down*," changing its meaning ever so slightly. While it means "*reducing or adapting to a lower level of understanding*" (Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 1995:420), I'm not advocating that I understand less or be involved in "*a lower level of understanding*." No, it's just that I wish to move from beautiful, but high-flown rhetoric - perhaps such as in critical theory, in the interpretive tradition and in other theories, too - based perhaps on abstractions derived from generalisations, which include prescription. Rather, I wish to move to my explanation of my research which is small-scale, dealing with myself and with other individuals, all of whom were researching their own individual practices as we enabled local, worthwhile change and improvement to take place, however small.

In exploring the theory practice relationship, Dadds says that: "*Theory has no autonomous existence from the theory user ....*" (1991); "*Theory exists only within people ....*"; and "*Theory alone does not change the world. People do*" (Dadds, 1993a: 231). So, if I understand Dadds correctly, theory is inextricably interwoven with the theory user, is within me as researcher. And it is I, and not theory so much that changes the world - or at least a concern I may have that needs to be worked on. I ask, however, couldn't theory and my "I", who does the improving and changing, be inextricably linked in that my "I" can do the creating of theory? I believe that is what I do when I connect the personal with the professional in my encounters with teachers - I create my own living educational theory.

I embrace Dadds' (1993a: 231) reference to action research being about "*Warm hearts, commitment, altruistic tendencies, and the ability to persuade ...*," I like to think of this phrase as being part of my two values of freedom and love that I try to embody in my life and actions with teachers and others. In trying to embody these values and

experiencing their negation, I am able to describe and explain my living educational theory. I wonder a little, though, about the meaning of the ending of Dadds' sentence that begins with *"warm hearts ...."* and ends with *"may be as equally important as clear ideas ...."* I think Dadds could continue to use her phrase *"clear ideas,"* but could perhaps consider it as being synonymous with living theory evolving from practice as she couples it also with *"Warm hearts ...."*

### Thinking and feeling go together

Let me now focus on Dadds' (1993a: 230) view that *"aspects of the literature"* present action research *"as a personally problem-free experience"* in which *"There are action research steps to be followed .... in some logical progression that will lead to cognitive enlightenment, and recognition of necessary change"* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 and Elliott, 1981). Action research is therefore *"systematic, linear, cerebral and behaviouristic."* For Dadds, supporters and teacher-researchers, in exploring their own values as practitioners, are emotionally committed to improving their respective practices. And so, feelings are inextricably interwoven in the action research process. Dadds (1993: 229) explains thus:

*it is a misconceived enterprise to try and separate teachers' thinking in action research from their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, their being and their sense of self.*

Evans (1995: internet) is also concerned about the lack of reference in the action research literature to *"action researchers' feelings about themselves, each other, and the situation ....."* She puts her concern thus:

*In looking back over the early writings about action research, I am puzzled as to why it is seen in terms of people thinking, doing, participating in social contexts, and becoming critical, without even a passing reference to the affective domain?*

Evans (ibid) wonders if, in the move towards Carr and Kemmis's (1986) ideas of 'rationality' and 'justice,' action researchers' feelings

are taken for granted, or not considered to be important? Carr and Kemmis (1986: 44), in concluding a section of their book on teachers' knowledge, emphasise reflexivity, knowing by doing, thinking critically, and being aware of the historical location and social context of educational acts. But in advising teachers to problematise their practice, they do so from a cognitive perspective and ignore the part played in that practice by emotions.

It seems, then, as if earlier action research schemes and models excluded feelings, and not only feelings, but also dilemmas, ambiguities, and experiences of "*the personal*" (Evans, 1995: internet). Following Lomax and Parker (1995), Evans (1995: internet) calls for more relational forms of representation in accounts of action research enquiries. Indeed, Evans (ibid) very strongly declares that:

*I would .... like to challenge those .... approaches which hold feeling and emotion to be less important than a cognitive approach to knowing.*

Evans (1995: internet) support Dadds' (1995b) notion that action research needs to be passionate enquiry. But what is the nature of the 'passionate enquiry' that Dadds (1995b: 7) speaks about? Dadds (ibid) says:

*I have .... come to understand that developing theory and practice through action research is not simply a matter for the intellect. There are many forces embedded within our histories and emotional lives that are brought to bear. Vicki's action research was a form of passionate enquiry. It was informed as much by her past as her present; as much by her feelings as her thoughts.*

Elliott (1993: 11), commenting on Dadds' notion of "passionate enquiry" in her chapter in his book (chapter 16: 229-242), has this to say:

*The chapter challenges the assumption which underpins the traditional rationalist paradigm of educational research, which assumes that detachment from 'the passions' of the self (biases) is a condition for developing insight and understanding. Dadds' case study .... constitutes a powerful argument for reconstructing educational research as a form of passionate enquiry, in which cognition is inextricably bound up with the quest for self-*



*realization, and none the worst for being so 'biased'.*

Marshall (in Reason and Rowan, 1981: 399) seems to me to celebrate 'bias' and, like Dadds, it may even, for her, be a part of 'the passions' of the self when she says that *"My bias is something I appreciate, it's part of me as a researcher."* Furthermore, she says that:

*And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution, and it's coherent and it's felt and it has all these other qualities which make me value it more than a detached attempt to be objective.*

But Marshall (ibid) startles me, too, with her reminder that there's a "dark side to this, the feeling that I've made it all up", and she wonders "how can I justify all this?" As for myself, my "biases," my "passions of the self" are invested in how I construct my own theory from my practice. It is a practice that I base on my embodiment of my values in my practice as I relate to myself intrapersonally and with others interpersonally. I realise that in holding values, I negate or contradict them and need, therefore, to improve my practice of the values. It's in the admission of contradiction (and it being pointed out to me, too, as with Zoe in chapter 2) and in my reflexive and retrospective search for improvement, that I believe that I can "justify all this" (can justify my explanation of my evidence), can overcome my feeling "that I've made it all up."

And as with Dadd's enquiry, and Elliott's depiction of it, my own action research enquiry about my creation of my own living educational theory obviously, too, includes feelings as well as thoughts. I believe that my thesis offers evidence to support Dadds' (p. 241) view that:

*if we cannot understand the complexities of what it feels like to be a teacher action researcher, we are disabled from providing the most supportive learning climate and the most supportive research relationship that we can offer.*

Perhaps I could also raise what Dadds (1993a: 231) calls "an additional and complementary," rather than a "competing" point when

I say that my feelings are, for me, at the service of my educative relationships with others in which I tried to embody my values, particularly those of freedom and love. As I said in chapter 7: *"At the heart of my research and thesis is the notion of 'valuing.'"* And valuing is to do with *"giving oneself worth and demanding recognition for it"* (Fukuyama (1992: 189). Every human being needs a *"sense of self-worth,"* declares Fukuyama (1992: 181). A part of my struggle in my thesis has been to represent to the best of my ability, through my experiences, what is seared in my consciousness regarding the need to both possess self-worth and to help others to acquire or strengthen it within themselves in their personal and professional lives. I have also been struggling to become more and more consciously aware that it is not superiority I sought for myself or others, but rather recognition on a basis of equality.

Regarding my embodiment of my own values of freedom and love in my practice, I know I couldn't have done so successfully without experiencing emotion. Following Goleman (1996: xii), I know that emotion has helped me to show concern for myself and for others as persons, which Goleman (ibid) calls 'emotional intelligence'. It is the kind of intelligence that, in my action research, filled me with zeal and persistence and gave me the ability to motivate myself in my encounters with others. Feelings are the moral agents that motivated me in my practice of my values in my educative relationships with others, and helped me to come to understand my thesis question, *"How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?"*

### *'Living educational theory'*

Regarding my use of the notion of 'living educational theory', I have of course, been hugely influenced by Whitehead. He developed the idea of living educational theory, which he offers as the basis of an epistemology of practice (Whitehead, 1993: 67-77). His idea is an invitation to us to consider ourselves as living contradictions where we espouse educational values that are not fully realised in our

educational practices. It was in constantly searching for the means by which a person could reflect these values in their practice, and in the continuing improvisatory experimentation that it offered them, that gave Whitehead's notion of action research its particular emphasis on personal renewal as a means of promoting a good social order (McNiff, Whitehead, and Laidlaw, 1992). Whitehead recognised the centrality of the 'I' of the researcher in relation to practice, to other participants, and to the context of the research. Lomax (1998: 10) calls Whitehead's view of action research "*a new discipline of educational enquiry*" and says it is based on his three arguments as follows:

*The first is that in questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?", "I" exists as a living contradiction in holding values and experiencing their denial at the same time as asking the question. The second is that "I" as a living contradiction is motivated to improve what he or she is doing .... The third is that the descriptions and explanations for their own learning which individuals create, constitute their own living educational theories.*

In chapter 7, I more fully answered my thesis question about how I came to create my own living educational theory as a form of "*improvisatory self-realisation*" (Winter, 1997; 1998). I explained that it was a theory that was based on and grew from my disciplined descriptions and explanations of my educative relationships with others. These explanations contained both 'intra' and 'inter'-personal dialogues. The 'intra'-personal dialogues helped me to represent my meanings to myself and the 'inter'-personal dialogues helped me to represent my meanings to others.

My writing of my thesis has been part of my reflective process and, as such, it has had the power to transform my thinking, rather than just being an end product of my action research enquiry practice. My writing of my thesis offered me the opportunity to theorise about what I have done and to come to some tentative conclusions about it.

I believe that my tentative conclusions showed that I was not examining the practice of others, as a 'spectator' would do who was

outside of my practice. Rather, my tentative conclusions showed how I connected the personal with the professional as a 'participant' in my explanation of my educative relationships with others. I attempted - and often succeeded - in accepting, affirming and confirming others so that they confidently answered questions to do with improving what they were doing, thus enabling them to live out more fully their values in their respective practices.